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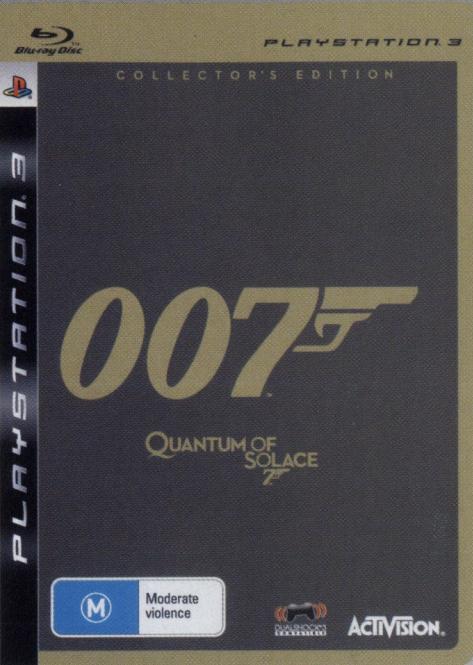
PLAYSTATION 3

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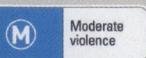
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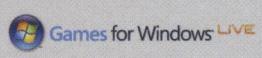


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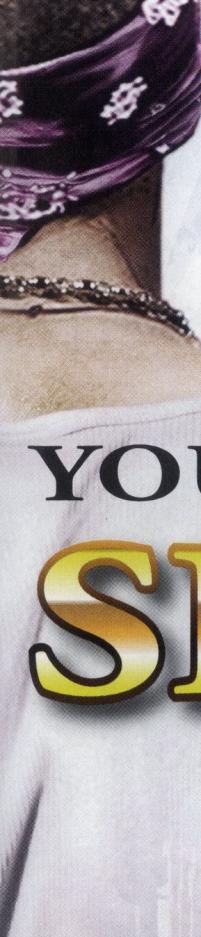
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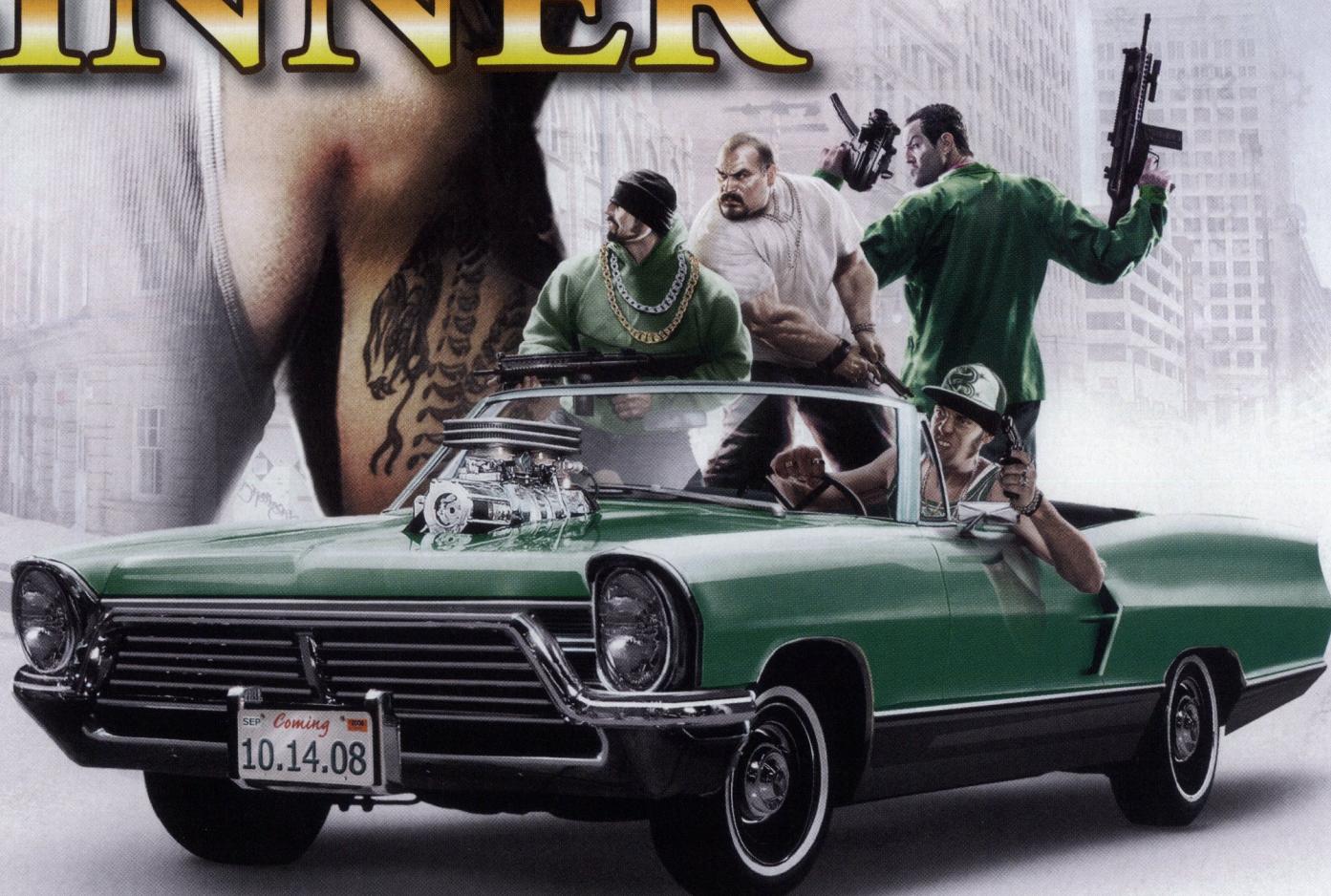
Strong violence,
sexual references
and coarse language



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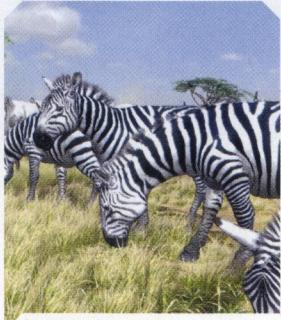
30 Resident Evil 5

No one could argue that 2008 has been a hell of a year for videogaming – but could 2009 be even better? Yes, if Resident Evil 5 has anything to say about it...



36 PREVIEW Prince of Persia

One of the most beautiful games we've seen this gen – but how does it play? Read on and find out fool!



42 PREVIEW Afrika

Remember this one? We kinda do... Sony's mysterious safari theme game has made it to Japan, and we've played it!



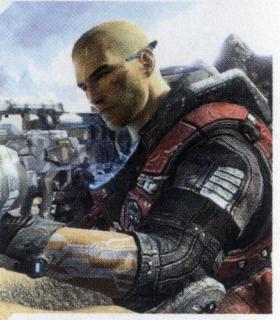
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We interview legendary producer Yoshinori Ono about the latest entry into the Street Fighter franchise!



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We've been gassing this one up for months, does in live up to its heady promise? Head to page 76 to find out!



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A shooter with a fresh gimmick? We don't believe it! We get our hands dirty with LucasArts latest new title!

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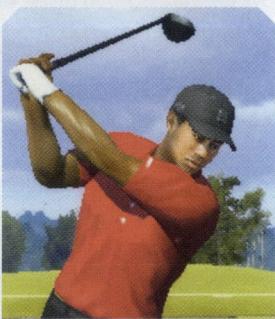
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The earth moves



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Arguably 2007's game of the year, *BioShock* hits the PS3!

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22 WIN! WIN!
WIN! WIN!

A home theatre system, and copies of *Pure*, *BIA:HH* and *The Force Unleashed* up for grabs...



WIN!

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EDITOR'S LETTER



"Official PlayStation just won the IEAA award for best gaming publication. A pat on the back to us all!"

Warm toilet seats, Mister Donut, all things kawaii, Japanese beer, the Lolita look, game CD soundtracks, Pocky and the *Resident Evil* team singing 'Y.M.C.A' in Japanese at 3am, just a few reasons why I heart Japan!

There is no secret in the office that when it comes to morbid, odd or spine chilling that I am up for it. Label something haunted, hand me a candle, that will inevitably go out, and I am in heaven. Send me to Japan, lock me in a room with the game I crave the most, *Resident Evil 5*, and my world is divine. I can't rave enough about it and I am positively itching for more.

Of course, there are so many games hitting the shelves before 2009 that we're climbing walls, travelling across Africa, falling to (LEGO) pieces, scoring goals and shooting anything stupid enough to get in our way. Good times!

NEWS FLASH! Official PlayStation just won the IEAA award for best gaming publication. A pat on the back to us all!

Vanessa Morgan
Editor
PS3 online: **sibernaut**

'It's fun to stay at the y-m-c-a' – Village People

PlayStation®
Official Magazine - Australia

What do you heart about japan?

MARK SERRELS

All jokes aside, I lived in Japan for almost two years, I even met my wife there, so the list of things I love about Japan would be too long for this page, let alone this tiny section. I still get homesick for Japan to this day... (tear).

Online: [Serrels](#)



PHILLIP JORGE

This is so easy it's unbelievable – *Naruto*, baby! Datte-bayo! Believe it or not I actually own a *Naruto* headband, and every book of manga available. That's my way of being a ninja, baby!

Online: [PhiLLipO](#)



ANTHONY O'CONNOR

I HEART Japan because it's a futuristic metropolis. It reminds me of *Blade Runner* but with pantie vending machines (for that mighty used undies thirst), and the occasional Godzilla. Roar!

Online: [stoxyz242](#)



DAVE KOZICKI

Bear and used panty vending machines, Otaku comic shops, apples the size of your head, the insane politeness, wacky TV shows with hotties in school uniforms, Sharkskin Man and my sister deserves a mention...

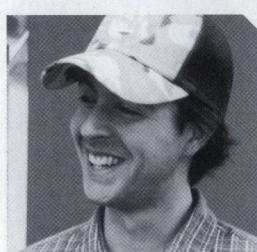
Online: [ko-zee-ii](#)



JAMES ELLIS

In Japan you can buy toilet seats that plug in and fire jets of warm water up your date. You can make the streams oscillate or pulse, and the seat has an in-built warmer. Can be used for business or leisure... or pleasure.

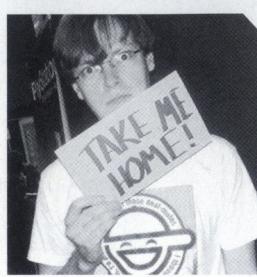
Online: [gtfaster49](#)



JAMES COTTEE

I like their whole attitude to coping with the trauma of starting, then losing, World War II – they just pretend it never happened. Their games and cartoons glorify militarism – they clearly haven't learned a bloody thing. Also – sexy schoolgirls...

Online: [DrWho3987](#)



EDITORIAL & DESIGN

EDITOR: Vanessa Morgan
vanessa@derwenthoward.com.au

DEPUTY EDITOR:

Mark Serrels

WRITERS:

Dylan Burns, James Ellis, David Wildgoose, Anthony O'Connor, James Cotttee, Amy Flower, David Kozicki, Jonti Davis

ART DIRECTOR: Phillip Jorge

CREATIVE DIRECTOR: Paul Cook

PUBLISHING & CIRCULATION

MANAGING DIRECTOR:

Nick Cutler

CIRCULATION ENQUIRIES:

(02) 8305 6900

SENIOR CIRC AND MARKETING:

Lenora Daniel

PRODUCTION MANAGER:

Graham Hood

ADVERTISING

GROUP SALES MANAGER:

Alex Brereton

alex@derwenthoward.com.au

Phone :: (02) 8305 6909

ADVERTISING COORDINATOR:

Elissa Lawrence

HOW TO CONTACT US:

TEL: (02) 8305 6900

FAX: (02) 8305 6999

EMAIL:

ops@derwenthoward.com.au
Derwent Howard Media Pty Ltd
P.O. Box 1037
Bondi Junction NSW 1355

WANT TO SUBSCRIBE? 136 116
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MANAGEMENT

DIRECTORS:

Jim Flynn, Nathan Berkley

FINANCE DIRECTOR:

Sandy Barnes

MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTANT:

Stuart Harle

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Gaming's latest and greatest...

BUZZ

The Games Convention in Leipzig disappoints, *home* in 2008... guaranteed, *MGS4* on 360 debunked, and much more...

UNCONVENTIONAL

The Games Convention disappoints?

While the Games Convention in Leipzig has typically been dismissed as 'E3-lite' in the past, the gaming landscape has changed. E3 itself has now morphed into its very own 'E3-lite', and all eyes are now on GC to step up and claim the mantle of main event expo in the world of videogaming.

Sadly the expo, much like E3 before it, was a bit of a disappointment, with most third parties loathe to support this European showcase. Of the big three (Sony, Nintendo, Microsoft), Sony was the only company that even *had* a press conference. In addition, they were the only company with something new to announce.

The big announcements in question, however, were in terms of hardware,

instead of any new titles (we were hoping for more on *Heavy Rain* and *MAG*). Possibly the biggest of these announcements was the new iteration of the PSP – the PSP 3000.

With an improved screen, and an all-new microphone, the update is admittedly slight, but we're looking forward to checking out this (relatively) new piece of kit.

Sony also announced a new attachable keypad for the PS3, which attaches slickly to your SIXAXIS or DualShock 3, and an all new 160GB PS3 SKU which we Australians WON'T BE GETTING!

What the hell?
Screwed again...



PSP 3000 PHONE HOME?

After having just released the second version of the PSP just last Christmas, we can't help but question the reasoning behind releasing another SKU so close to the last. The addition of the microphone is possibly a big clue – and it doesn't take a genius to suggest that a possible PSP phone device, that goes above and beyond Skype, may be in Sony's future. In many ways the PSP is competing with the iPhone more than other handheld gaming devices.



NO 160GB – WHY!?

Well, it's a tricky question, but we imagine that it's partly due to the fact that Aussies haven't gotten access to either Play TV or the downloadable movie service yet (both major reasons to get a larger hard drive). We haven't ruled out the possibility that Australia might get the new SKU later, but ultimately we find the whole thing redundant – it's possible to pick up a 500GB hard drive for less than \$100. We'd recommend going with that option instead for over three times the storage space, at a far cheaper price...

ON THE FORUMS...

No 160GB for Aus...

Riftinducer

The 160GB SKU isn't coming to Aus anytime soon.

Bagmup

Why is Sony wasting time with this and not getting *home* up and running?

Northy179

Considering the PS3 HDDs are swappable for bigger HDDs what's the point of releasing new SKUs every month?

Kamakazi Janabi

Totally agree, Sony is wasting too much time cancelling exclusives, for this kind of stuff...



HOME IN 2008

Are we there yet?

Rapidly becoming a bit like a joke with nary a punchline in sight, *home* delays have come thick and fast, and each one seems to elicit more frustration than the last.

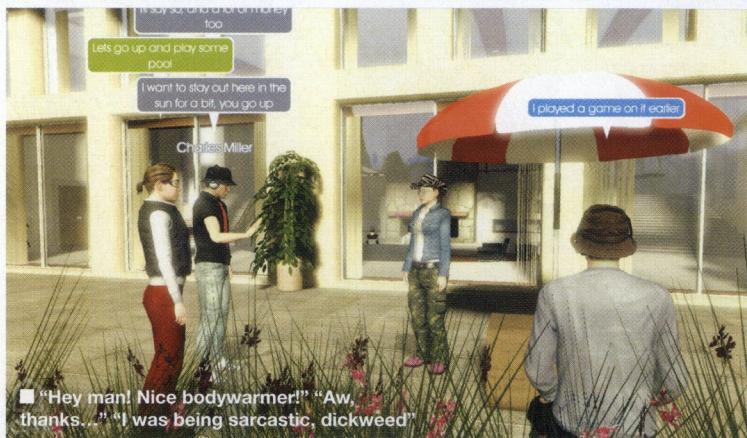
This time, however, it just so happens to be good news regarding *home*. Firstly, and most importantly, producer Martin Van Der Meulen has guaranteed, 100%, that *home* will arrive on the PS3 before 2009 – so we will undoubtedly be seeing *home* this year.

Secondly, he has also promised that the service will remain free, that at no point in *home*'s existence will PS3 owners

have to pay for the service.

Talking to IGN, Van Der Meulen also revealed that plenty of unlockables would appear in *home* that were directly representational of the games you have played and completed – for example, if players have completed *God of War 3*, they'll have access to a Kratos t-shirt.

It's this kind of crossover between gaming and *home* that intrigues us most – Media Molecule, creators of *LittleBigPlanet*, have already mentioned that their game will have some crossover potential with *home*. We can't wait to hear the specifics.



We've known this for quite a while now, but were sworn to secrecy under pain of death by testi-satchel removal, but Billy Corgan lead singer of *The Smashing Pumpkins* has now been announced as being part of the

extensive cast of Activision's *Guitar Hero World Tour*.

Alongside chrome-dome comes the announcement of new track 'Today', one of our personal favourites amongst the extensive *Smashing Pumpkins* discography.

And, in addition, rock geriatric Sting has also been added to *World Tour* delighting mothers everywhere (old women love Sting and his tantric flexibilities).

Corgan, his folically challenged cranium, and Sting join an extensive list of rock royalty, including Ozzy Osbourne, Hayley Williams (hot chick from *Paramore*) and that weird looking drummer dude from *Blink 182*.

WHAT'S HOT AND WHAT'S NOT...

Resident Evil 5
New updated control system – solid!

LittleBigPlanet
Next month... next month, people...

PS3 Keypad
Almost awesome – just kinda cool for now...

BioShock
Better late than never?
Yes and no...

Movie downloads?
Give us a release date at least will ya?

PSP 3000
Is there really a point to all this?

No 160GB?
How much rejection can we Aussies take?



HOT!

NOT!

BUZZ

INFO NUDGE

Prodding you in the ribs with all the latest newsbites...



LITTLEBIG-REGION

After some crazy rumours that downloadable content in *LittleBigPlanet* would be region specific (ie, players wouldn't be able to download content created in Japan, or the US).

Thankfully, however, a Sony rep debunked said rumour by stating that there will only be one region – a 'LittleBigRegion'. Players will be able to download from wherever they choose!



THE BIG SCREEN

The Sony firmware updates are coming thick and fast, and 2.5 is reportedly not too far away. Another rumour doing the rounds at the moment states that 2.5 will allow for a 'screen grab' function, letting players take

pics of whatever's on their screen at any time. Personally we hope this feature becomes a reality...



ROCKIN' RUMOUR

Disappointed that *GTA IV* was multiplatform? So were we to a certain extent – but rumour (started by US mag EGM) states that Rockstar North, the team behind

Grand Theft Auto IV, have actually started work on an all-new exclusive for the PS3. As said before, it's merely an unconfirmed rumour at this stage, but we can only hope...



DARK RISING

It seems like the OFLC have started to finally lighten up a bit! Remember *Dark Sector* – featuring the glaive that lopped off head like a kid eating jelly babies (worst simile ever...)? Well it finally received classification, and gamers can finally get their grubby mitts on the game. We enjoyed this game when we reviewed it way back, it's definitely worth checking out.

IN THE ZONE

Bots and Co-op confirmed for *Killzone 2*

As a single player experience, *Killzone 2* is already looking like the kind of polished, focused experience that fans will love – we should know, we've played it!

But it seems Guerrilla haven't stopped there, and are now focusing on other aspects of *Killzone 2*. Co-op, which was previously unannounced, will now be part of a post-release patch for the game. It's possible that Guerrilla started working on this feature too late to make release. It's also possible that Sony may charge us peons for the privilege. Hmm... we hope it's the former.

In addition to that, AI controlled bots have now been confirmed for *Killzone 2*'s multiplayer, all with customisable difficulties.

Is there anything this game can't do?



AND THE WINNER IS...

Trophy support starts trickling in!

While we were initially worried regarding developer support for the PS3's new trophy system, it seems that the latest batch of games coming in are thankfully getting on board.

We've noticed that, in almost every new title we've had the pleasure of checking out this month, there's been the odd trophy popping up every now and then. Titles such as *Dead Space*, *Far Cry 2*, *LBP*, and *BioShock* all have trophy support.

Here's to developers adopting the trophy system as standard – the ball's in your court now.

MGS4 ON 360?

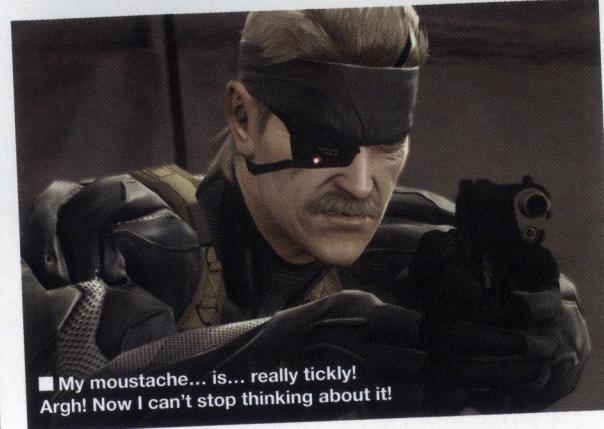
Just drop it already!

It's testament to both the strength of the *MGS* franchise and the slow death of the third party exclusive that, no matter how many times Kojima or Konami debunks it, the rumour that *Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots* is coming to 360 just won't wither and die the way it should.

But now, Kojima has had enough. During an interview with Eurogamer, good ol' Hideo got asked the inevitable question

Regarding *Guns of the Patriots* and its PS3 exclusivity. Typically Kojima reaffirmed the game's exclusivity, adding that "kind of disturbs me sometimes, because a lot of people ask me about this PS3/360 question... it's not about the hardware - I want people to look at the game itself".

Yeah, idiots. Leave the great man alone, stop badgering him with stupid questions and play the game... on a PS3!



■ My moustache... is... really tickly!
Argh! Now I can't stop thinking about it!

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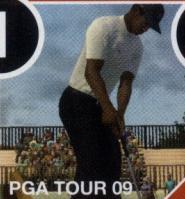
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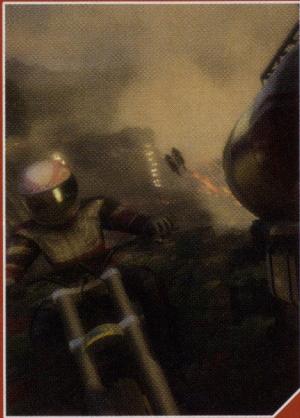


3



Rank	Title	Category	Distributor
4	Buzz! Quiz TV	Party	Sony
5	Metal Gear Solid 4	Action	Atari
6	Gran Turismo 5: Prologue	Driving	Sony
7	Race Driver: GRID	Driving	Atari
8	Soulcalibur IV	Fighting	Activision
9	Madden NFL 2009	Sports	EA
10	Battlefield: Bad Company	Shooter	EA

COMING SOON



OUR MAN IN JAPAN

Games in milk bars? Insanity...



I like the notion of buying games at the combini (convenience store). Games are a convenience I can't do without, so in a way it makes sense. But while Japan's combini

chains are powerful enough to sell games at low prices (just an estimation: I'd guess there's a combini for every 20 citizens here), they don't have the floor space needed to stock a great range of titles. So you can pick up *MGS4*, no problem, but you'll have to visit a genuine games shop or the games corner of an electronics retail megastore if you're looking for *MotorStorm Complete* (or some other non-performing Western title).

Combini game shopping isn't quite as limited as that, though. If you're after some PSN action, you can buy tickets that are redeemable online and can be used to stuff

your virtual wallet with virtual yen. These tickets are the perfect solution for those who want to buy games from the PlayStation Store without getting their credit cards involved. I say "almost" because it's not possible to buy a 1,200yen ticket, for example, which would be the exact amount of dunza required for two PlayStation titles from the Game Archives area of the PS Store. The tickets are available in 1,000, 3,000 and 5,000yen varieties – 600yen (the price of original PlayStation games) only being perfectly divisible into the 3,000yen version. So you'll often be left with virtual change – which, although it doesn't rattle, is still a bit of an annoyance.

On a brighter note, there have been some superb games released into the Japanese Game Archives recently, including a few rarities whose 600yen price tags are so good to see that I was worried they might have been misprinted. Gems I've downloaded in the past month: *Rakugaki Showtime*, *Xenogears*, *Metal Gear Solid* and *Einhander*. Awesome bargains, each and every one of them.



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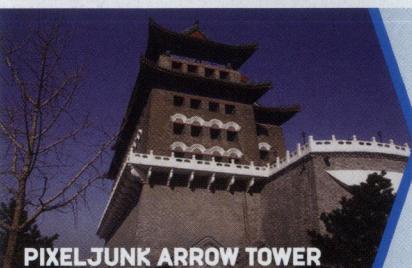
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What's next for our favourite games?

WHERE TO NOW?

Q-Games has an admirable mission statement: to deliver retro-style games with slick, state of the art PS3 presentation. Their classic *PixelJunk Monsters* has been a hit on the PS3 worldwide, and we can't get enough of it here in the office. But after *Eden*, where will the *PixelJunk* series head to next?



THE GAME?	EXPLAIN YOURSELF...	THE STORY	HOW WILL IT PLAY?	PROBABILITY
 PIXELJUNK PIXELJUNK REVOLUTION	The nameless, tribal-mask-wearing, 'defender of the forest' character in <i>PJM</i> would build towers, then boost their power by dancing in front of them. What else could he boost with his dancing power?	Like the <i>Elite Beat Agents</i> , or the cheerleaders in <i>Ouendan</i> , the 'defender of the forest' dude travels around helping people by dancing in front of things. Can won't start? He'll dance in front of it. Hard drive crash? Sorted. Erectile dysfunction? A thing of the past.	The simple rhythmic action would lend itself to <i>PaRappa the Rapper</i> style gameplay, with button taps directing your boogie-woogie dance moves. He could also suck on poisonous frogs for screen-warping power-ups.	Low. The <i>PixelJunk</i> programmers try new things with each game, and they've already done dance. Sucking poisonous frogs, on the other hand...
 PIXELJUNK FLOCK	The Flock were the little baby village people your 'defender of the forest' character protected. Each monster who slipped through your defences would kill one, its angel floating off the screen.	Like the Muppet Babies, the Flock have got their own tale to tell; mostly involving fanciful, imagined adventures concocted in the safety of their crèche. When he's off defending the village, their dad can't keep an eye on the stash of poisonous frogs.	A <i>Kingdom Hearts</i> style multi-realm adventure, in which the Flock explore all the trippy fantasy lands conjured up in Sony games. They could jump with <i>Vib Ribbon</i> , perform with <i>Um Jammer Lammy</i> , and wave glow-sticks by the side of the <i>WipeOut</i> track.	Daxter and Clank got their own games, so who knows. Hey... 'Daxter & Clank'. That could work.
 PIXELJUNK ARROW TOWER	Jack of all trades, master of none, the Arrow Tower was an all-around emplacement. That is, it was crap at blasting bats, crap at blasting giants, and average at blasting spiders. Don't quit your day job!	But what is its day job? Plagued by insecurities at its entry-level, mediocre function in life, the Arrow Tower has chosen to lash out at the world, placing its sort-of-deadly arrows where they'll hurt the most. There's no escape from its ineffectual wrath!	Classic shooting-gallery action. You can either dig up your (ridiculous plastic) <i>Time Crisis</i> guns, or simply direct your crosshairs with the thumb-sticks. As innocent bystanders wander past, get all Book Depository on their arses!	Low; as a stand-alone game. Would be perfect for a hidden bonus mode in <i>PJM 2</i> , however.
 PIXELJUNK MONSTERS MONSTERS	Attacking en masse, the <i>PixelJunk Monsters</i> are hell bent on destroying the timid, bipedal forest dwellers. Yet they attack in ordered, predictable waves, and ignore the killer defence towers. Idiots!	As the leader of the <i>PixelJunk Monsters</i> Monsters, your mission is to guide your predictable waves of cannon fodder through the path of least resistance to their final objective: eating babies. Why? Because a baby killed your father!	Like a conventional real-time strategy game. Observe what towers the AI is building, and where, and direct your mindless waves of walking, flying and crawling monsters accordingly. You can almost taste the babies!	Hella low. Though it wouldn't take much for a bored code master to hack the game to change the sides.
 PIXELJUNK PIXELJUNK	The <i>PixelJunk</i> series stems from the powerful brains at Q-Games, the developer that also brought us the Cross Media Bar for the PS3 interface. They are clearly brilliant game designers. But who are they?	Disaster! <i>PixelJunk</i> 's supply of poisonous frogs have escaped from their cage! They must be captured before they escape the <i>PixelJunk</i> Building, lest the source of inspiration for all <i>PixelJunk</i> games be lost forever!	Third-person, over-the-shoulder, frog-hunting action. Collect escaping frogs and place them in your frog sack. Suck on multiple frogs to slow down time and increase perception. Hurry! Time is running out! Note: OPS does not condone anyone sucking on frogs. Winners don't use drugs.	It's very, very unlikely that <i>PixelJunk</i> will give away their trade secrets!



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LETTERS

LETTER OF THE MONTH

HE HAD TO SPLIT

Hey guys, I read your magazine every month but this is the first time I've had a chance to write to you about, and, quite frankly, the first time I've had an issue worth writing to you about.

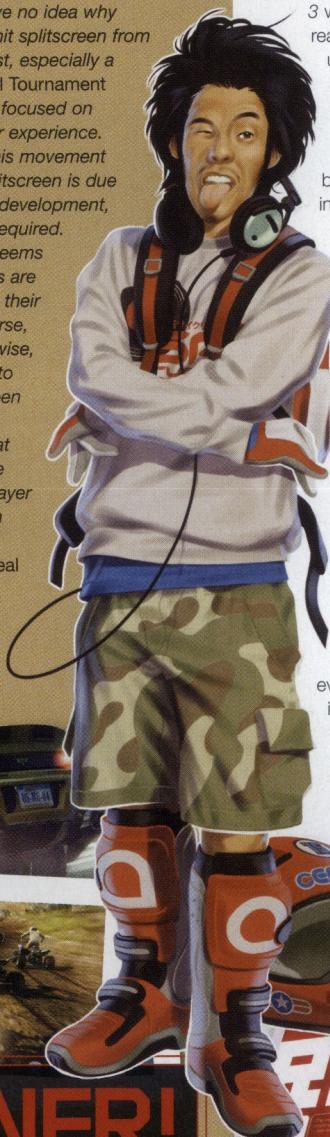
Just the other day I got some time to play *Unreal Tournament 3* and I remember what was told to consumers when it was released on the PS3 – that is, of course, that offline splitscreen was not regarded as a necessary feature for this release. Don't get me wrong, *UT3* is still a brilliant game with regards to what it does deliver, but I still can't get over the fact that it has the potential for so much more. Sure it has online capabilities, but there's no substitute for sitting down with a bunch of friends or a sibling to humiliate each other face to face.

I went online to try and prove myself wrong about this, but found the opposite. Administrator for Epic Games Mark Rein virtually crushed all hope of ever seeing splitscreen on the PS3, telling me that I "should be happy" with what I have. Since when did developers adopt the mantra that near enough is good enough? Rein claims that they don't have the resources to make the patch, but I think it's just a shining example of corporate laziness at its finest. The addition of splitscreen won't justify a big enough boost in profit margin so they're willing to let a good game with so much more potential stay just as it is. It's coming to

the point where I may just find myself losing faith in gaming.

Clinton, via email

*This is a very real issue that frustrates us time and time again, and to be honest we have no idea why some titles omit splitscreen from their feature list, especially a title like *Unreal Tournament 3*, which is so focused on the multiplayer experience. We suspect this movement away from splitscreen is due to the cost of development, and the time required. In addition it seems like developers are loathe to have their game look worse, performance wise, in an attempt to make splitscreen multiplayer functional. That being said, the lack of multiplayer in games such as *Burnout Paradise*, *Unreal Tournament 3*, *Pure*, and a host of others, is almost criminal.*



WINNER!

The letter of the month this issue will receive a copy of *BioShock* for their troubles – enjoy!



■ So that's why my penis enlarger never arrived in the mail...

MIGHTY MORPHINE

I read with interest your feature on an R18+ rating, in particular the reason *Fallout 3* was banned. I understand the reasoning the Classification Board used to reach their decision, but is this the only issue they had with the game? It seems a little extreme to ban the game on this one issue. Would the game have been banned if aspirin was used instead of morphine? All of these are used for pain relief in our society. I understand morphine is a much stronger drug and can be addictive, but shouldn't the Classification Board look at the context in which the drug is used? I presume in *Fallout 3* morphine is used to relieve pain. How is that different to real life? If the context of the morphine use was addiction then I agree there is an issue with the game, but if the context was purely pain relief I fail to see how this would encourage players to take morphine for any other reason. I actually think *GTA IV* would be more likely to encourage drug use, even though there is no instance in the game of drug use being positively reinforced. Wouldn't the binge drinking in *GTA IV* be more likely to have an impact on players? Game developers must get very frustrated when trying to provide mature gamers

with a realistic gaming experience. Maybe Bethesda should make up a new drug? Gamers won't care (unless, of course, it's vast quantities of Strepsils), as long as it provides the desired effect – pain relief. I understand the desire and need to protect children, but decisions need to make sense as well. I'm not sure this one does.

David Fox, via email

Well, obviously we are in complete agreement with you on this issue. The question of consistency was raised on numerous occasions by different readers in our interview a couple of issues back, but it was (in our opinion) conveniently skipped over in the answers to those questions. On one hand we can appreciate that a game that positively reinforces the injection of intravenous drugs is problematic, but on the other hand it's difficult to justify banning the game for that reason when so many others have similar depictions of drug use. Regardless, the game has now been passed, and Bethesda have followed your advice and simply changed the name of the drugs – everyone's a winner in the end we suppose.

TESTI-TIME

Still lovin' the mag, but the real reason I write is to discuss the subject of online games, by bringing up the steaming pile of blowfly infested, African elephant turd cooking in the hot sun that was *Haze*. Although this game undoubtedly blew, it had one redeeming quality – it allowed



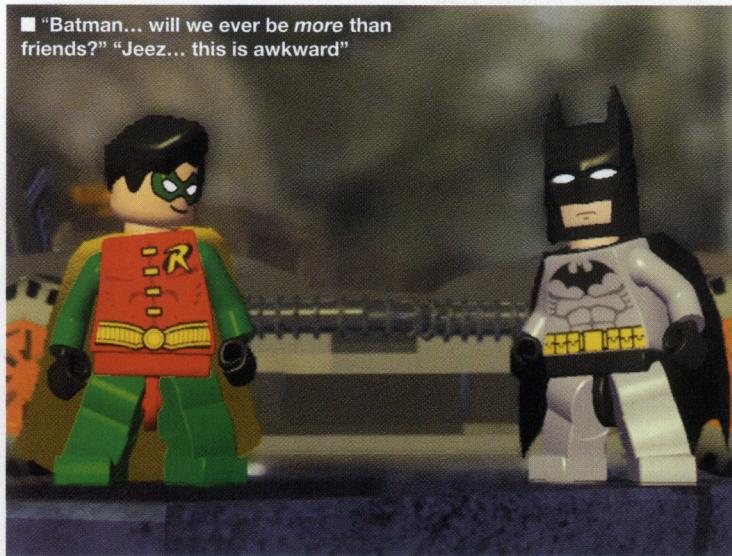


■ No means no, weird gimp man!

for online games to be filled with bots. I think ALL online orientated games should have this feature; without doubt it should be a standard feature in multiplayer shooters. And to take matters further, developers who do not comply to my strict policy should be tied to a steel post with their legs spread, their testicular areas exposed, then their unmentionables should be slashed rigorously with a blunt butter knife, and their scrotum injuries should be coated with honey. Lastly, for the big finale, they should be strapped onto a bull ant nest and made to feel the consequences...

Mike, via email

Mike, honestly, despite the fact that bots are an addition we would welcome in more videogames, nothing, and we mean nothing, justifies punishing another dude's crotch-ular (disclaimer: not actually a real word) area. Some things just need to be left alone and ye olde 'testi-satchel' is one of those areas. Hang them, garrote them, skin those suckers alive, but lay off the scrotum, for the love of all that's good and holy...



LEGO OF ME

When I was young I used to play with LEGO. I played with it everyday, up until I discovered videogames. Then consoles became my favourite toy. My first memory of the PlayStation was waking up at 4:30am, playing the hell out of it and waking up everyone else in the house. Anyway – back to the letter. Every game is good in its own way – some people like *Final Fantasy* while others like *Resident Evil*. Me, I love *Resident Evil* and I can't wait until *RE5* comes out. But there is one type of game I hate – LEGO games. When my friends talk about how good LEGO games are, I always ask them why they don't buy a full LEGO set if they love it so much? LEGO games are useless. When I was reading the 'best mag in the world', I found out that LEGO *Indiana Jones* and LEGO *Batman* was coming out and I almost puked. My question is, WHY DO STUPID PEOPLE LIKE THESE LEGO GAMES???

Meeko, via email

Meeko, Meeko, caps made baby Jesus cry, alright. We understand

that you have an issue here – but it won't be solved by e-shouting now, will it? Anyway, why don't you like LEGO games? Are you some kind of heartless Skeletor-man? LEGO games are fun times encapsulated into a joyous gobstopper of delicious pleasantries. How could you hate that, Meeko? How could you hate that?



INSIDE GAMING

We overhear a conversation with Chris Redfield and a strangely articulate zombie.

Zombie: Gnnnnnnuuuuuuuuuuuu...

Chris Redfield: (Firing off shots) Argh! Die you zombie freak – DIE!

Zombie: Gaaaaarrrrr... why are you shooting me!

Chris Redfield: Isn't it obvious?

Zombie: Euuugh... no – not really?

Chris Redfield: Well, you're a zombie... you're ambling ominously towards me, groaning and stuff, you're threatening to make a meal of my meat and two veg. You want to suck down on my brains and drink my blood – what am I supposed to do in this situation? Give you a hug?

Zombie: Well, um... yes.

Chris Redfield: Yes?

Zombie: Yes. That's all us zombies want – a hug. After a hard day's ambling and groaning, all we want is a hug.

Chris Redfield: Jeez man, I'm really sorry dude. I thought you wanted to feast on my brains.

Zombie: No, no, no... you've got it all wrong! It's all love baby... all you need is love! We don't want to eat you or anything, we just want some human contact.

Chris Redfield: (Sniffing) That's such

a tragedy, so terrible. All this time I've been putting lead into your guts, rocket launching your limbs into oblivion, and stomping on the heads of your zombie brothers and sisters – all you wanted in the end was sweet, sweet affection...

Zombie: Aw, c'mere you! (They hug enthusiastically)

Chris Redfield: Man – if this is wrong, I don't wanna be right...

Zombie: GUUUUUUUUUURRRRR... BRAINS...!!! (starts chomping on Chris's neck)

Chris Redfield: AIIIEEEEE! NOOOOO!

CUTTINGS

Delicious bite-sized letter morsels that are easy to swallow

TEH WEIRDZ

YOU ROCK!!!!!!
SORRY FOR THE B1G WR1T1NG!!! MY COMPUTER JUST BROKE.(:(. WHAT THE HELL IS HAPPENING?! OH GOD WHAT IN THE HOLY MOTHER OF JESUS CHRIST IS GOING ON!!

Sergy, via email

The youth of today, with their crazy Internet languages, their Pac Men, and their darn hippity hop music.

MADE IN JAPAN

What the hell happened to *Kingdom Hearts Birth by Sleep*? Please tell me when it's coming out!

Daniel, via email

The game is still in development at the moment, and is so far only confirmed for release in Japan. Don't worry though, we'll see it here eventually – just don't expect it anytime soon!

WE ARE THE CHAMPIONS

Can you do a list of trophy-supported games?

Alexander Garner

Sure thing... BUZZ! Quiz TV, LittleBigPlanet, MotorStorm: Pacific Rift, NBA 09, Bioshock, PAIN, PixelJunk Eden, Resistance 2, SOCOM: U.S. Navy SEALS Confrontation, Warhawk and Super Stardust HD. But that list will probably have increased by the time you guys read this.

LINUX

Do any of you guys recommend installing Linux onto your PS3?

Sergy, via email

It's definitely something most of us have thought about, but, as of now, none of us have tried it. If you want to use your PS3 as an all round media centre it may be worth a bash.

SPEAK TO US

Love the mag? Hate the mag?

We want your opinions and questions on OPS, on games – on anything that you feel the need to share with your fellow readers. The best letter of each issue wins the Game of the Month! Write to us on paper or on a computer at:

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DARK MATTER

We're less in the dark about this game! The truth can no longer be contained. The paranormal is everywhere!

Investigator Edward Carnby finds himself inexplicably cast into the eye of the storm, as over the course of one apocalyptic night he must uncover the earth-shattering secret behind Central Park. New York will never be the same again.

Five *Alone in the Dark* fans will win the PS3 game and a kit containing t-shirt, keyring, figurine, lighter and CD soundtrack. With 10 runners-up scoring the PS3 game.

To win, head to www.gameplayer.com.au/competitions and tell us in 25 words or less why New York isn't really a safe beat.

**Gameplayer code word:
Eddie**

**ALONE
IN THE DARK**



UNLEASHED

Sound yourself with the oh so pleasant noises of a lightsaber as you deck your place out with this darn sexy home theatre system from Philips and Activision. One major winner will score not only a copy of *Star Wars: The Force Unleashed*, but an awesome brand new surround sound speaker system with an absolutely incredible feature set, which includes:

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- Karaoke Scoring for fun, exciting, and frequently hilarious song contests
- Wireless rear speakers for fewer wires across your room

Plus 10 runners-up will grab a copy of the ultimate *Star Wars* experience, *The Force Unleashed* on PS3.

To win, head to www.gameplayer.com.au/competitions and tell us in 25 words or less what epic *Star Wars* soundtrack toots your horn?

Gameplayer code word: Philips



COMPS



FULLY ARMED

No need to rock in empty handed, we've got you armed with 10 copies of *Brothers in Arms: Hell's Highway* on PS3 along with a limited edition comic book from the series and a cap to keep your noggin all warm.

Hell's Highway will take the WWII shooter into the next generation of gaming with amazing graphics and sound, new cutting-edge gameplay features and a totally redesigned online component.

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**Gameplayer
code word: Boom**

PURE

Speed, adrenaline, a kick-arse soundtrack!
It's a sweet ride even before you throw in the ATVs and airtime that will make your jaw drop and a gooey substance drip onto your pretty patterned couch.

We're riding high with 10 copies of the game on PS3 to giveaway.

Featuring vertigo-inducing massive aerial jumps in real-world quad locations, *Pure* delivers heart-pounding off-road racing unique to the genre.

To win, head to www.gameplayer.com.au/competitions and tell us in 25 words or less, what gets your adrenaline pumping.

Gameplayer code word: Speed

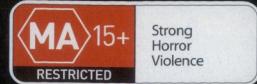


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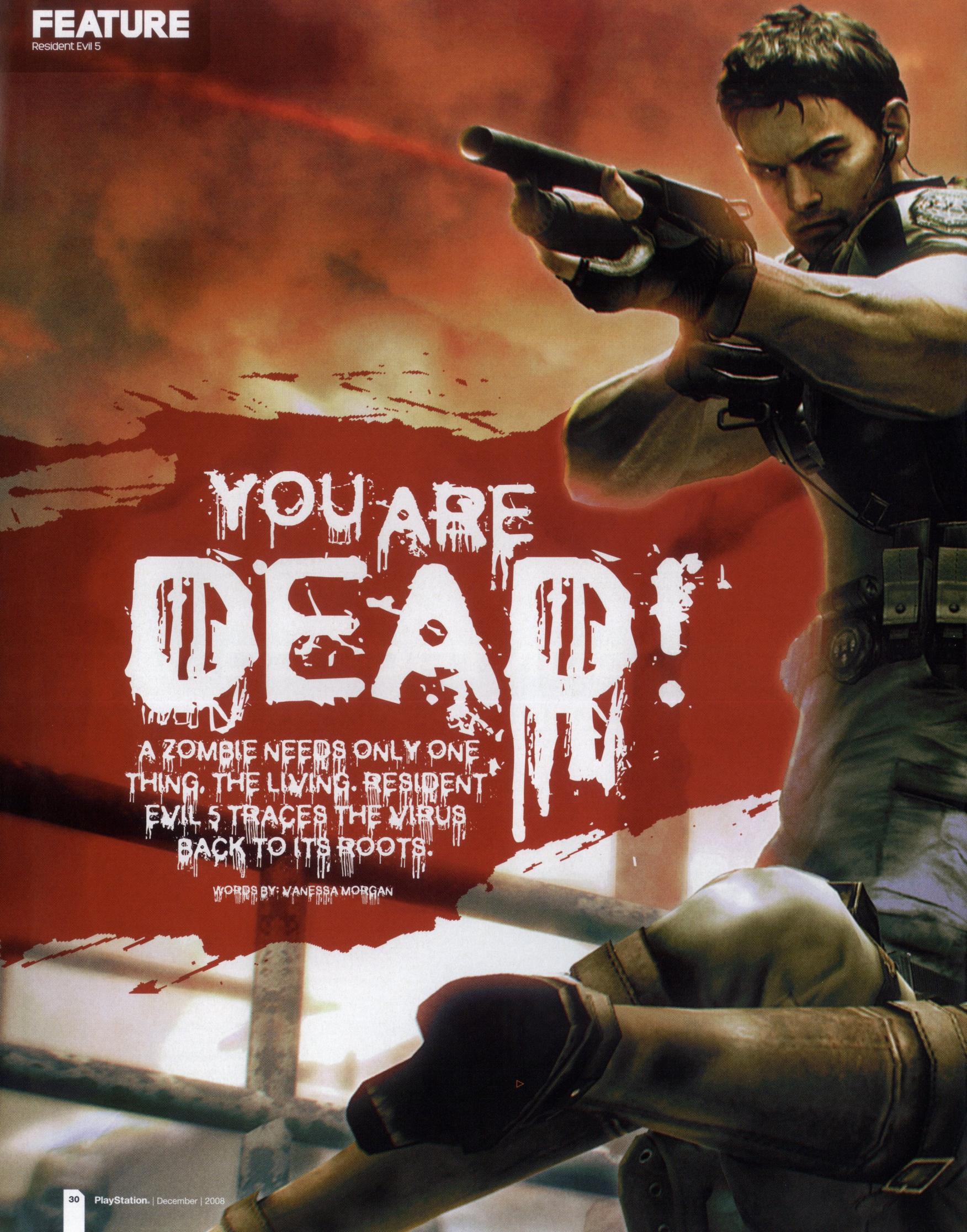


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YOU ARE DEAD!

A ZOMBIE NEEDS ONLY ONE THING. THE LIVING. RESIDENT EVIL 5 TRACES THE VIRUS BACK TO ITS ROOTS.

WORDS BY: VANESSA MORGAN



Japan's culture, not unlike Australia's ecology, has grown and individualised itself largely due to the isolation that only an island can provide. The Edo period, acknowledged as the beginning of the early modern period of Japan, was the most influential in setting up the ideology that the country is recognised for.

With 69 percent of Japan's tourism coming from like-minded countries throughout Asia, such as Korea and Taiwan, it's not surprising that it is rare to come face to face with another person of Anglo appearance while negotiating your way through the clichés of vending machines and sardine-like subway carriages.

And while this might all sound a little deep for a videogame

magazine, stepping into the Japanese culture has provided every Westerner, since Commodore Matthew Perry ended the country's seclusion in 1853, with a sense of awe and wonderment. As a voyeur perving on the society as a whole, the contradictions seem large and numerous. Japan is a land of tradition with areas like Gion, Kyoto and Atami, Shizuoka still supporting strong Geisha communities, Sumo wrestlers training in 54 stables across Japan, building body mass but still unable to drive cars as a result of Sumo 'law' and futons that are rolled out every night underneath plasma TVs.

Japan is home to late night karaoke sessions of Backstreet Boys and Elvis 'classics', titillating anime and manga on every street corner, and a thriving videogame industry that made a plumber one of the most recognised and iconic characters worldwide.

In this place of transformations, horror can be traced from the ghost stories of the Edo period through to the J-Horror of *Ringu*, *The Grudge* and *Dark Water*. Then there is *Forbidden Siren*, *Project Zero*, *Silent Hill* and ultimately the *Resident Evil* series, all of which not only perpetuate the 'psychological horror', but expand the genre to

more than just 'ghost stories'. Producer of *Resident Evil 5*, Jun Takeuchi, says that much of the success of the horror genre in Japan can be linked to this early period of development for the country. "Back in the day when we were making the first *Resident Evil* we decided to look into it saying, 'I wonder why this is?'"

"Looking into it we came across different elements from Japanese culture – one thing we came across was Kaidan. It is a type of horror story that's been very popular since the Edo period in Japan over 150 years ago. Growing up hearing these horror stories I think has an influence on you, and makes you more perceptive as to what horror is and how to tell scary stories". ▷



COME FROM THE LAND DOWNUNDER



It was widely reported in Australian newspapers that Australian model and actress Michelle Van Der Water was the inspiration for Sheva Alomar. However, co-producer, Masachika Kawata says "That story is true, however she is only the model for Sheva's face. There is another model for her voice and motion capture. She was chosen after looking at hundreds of faces and the director thought she was closest to what we were looking for."

EXPERIMENTATION... EVOLUTION... EXTINCTION?

So, how does a maturing franchise that has led the way in the survival horror genre adapt to take on a new generation of gamers without writing off existing fans? It's no surprise that many have called the controls of the *Resident Evil* series outdated. The stop and shoot method is rarely seen in next-gen games and the inability to dodge or avoid projectiles is often frustrating.

However, *Resident Evil 5* now has a secondary control system – nicknamed "Gears", after *Gears of War* – which will introduce strafing to the series, meaning, at last, players can employ the familiar tactics of using cover to avoid the fierce attacks of the living dead.

Playing through a level set in a deserted train yard, the sun blocked by the high carriages and cargo containers, with heavily armed zombies pelting Molotov cocktails and firing at you with crossbows, the new controls become instantly useful.

Especially as the zombies are the least of your worries! Scrapping around, howling at the pleasure of Chris and Sheva's gushing blood stream, are what we like to think of as a new variety of 'hellhound'.

These dogs have the ability to scurry under the carriages, and once shot go all Cerberus on you as the multi-headed creatures whip out what can only be described as a metre of dripping saliva, laced with acid barbs. It ain't pretty!

So, with your prime objective is to avoid the attacks, as you won't always be able to shoot your way through all the undead due to poor ammo to horde ratio, these new sidestepping abilities come into play.

But you're still going to need to stop before loading up and firing – a decision made primarily because the developers see *Resident Evil* at its core as "a horror game, not a third person shooter" – thus

building tension as you steady yourself for the approaching masses.

Along with strafing, the shooting mechanism will be more familiar to the general gamer. Using **□** to aim, reloading quickly with a double tap and evading with the use of **⊗** is all common practice for gamers.

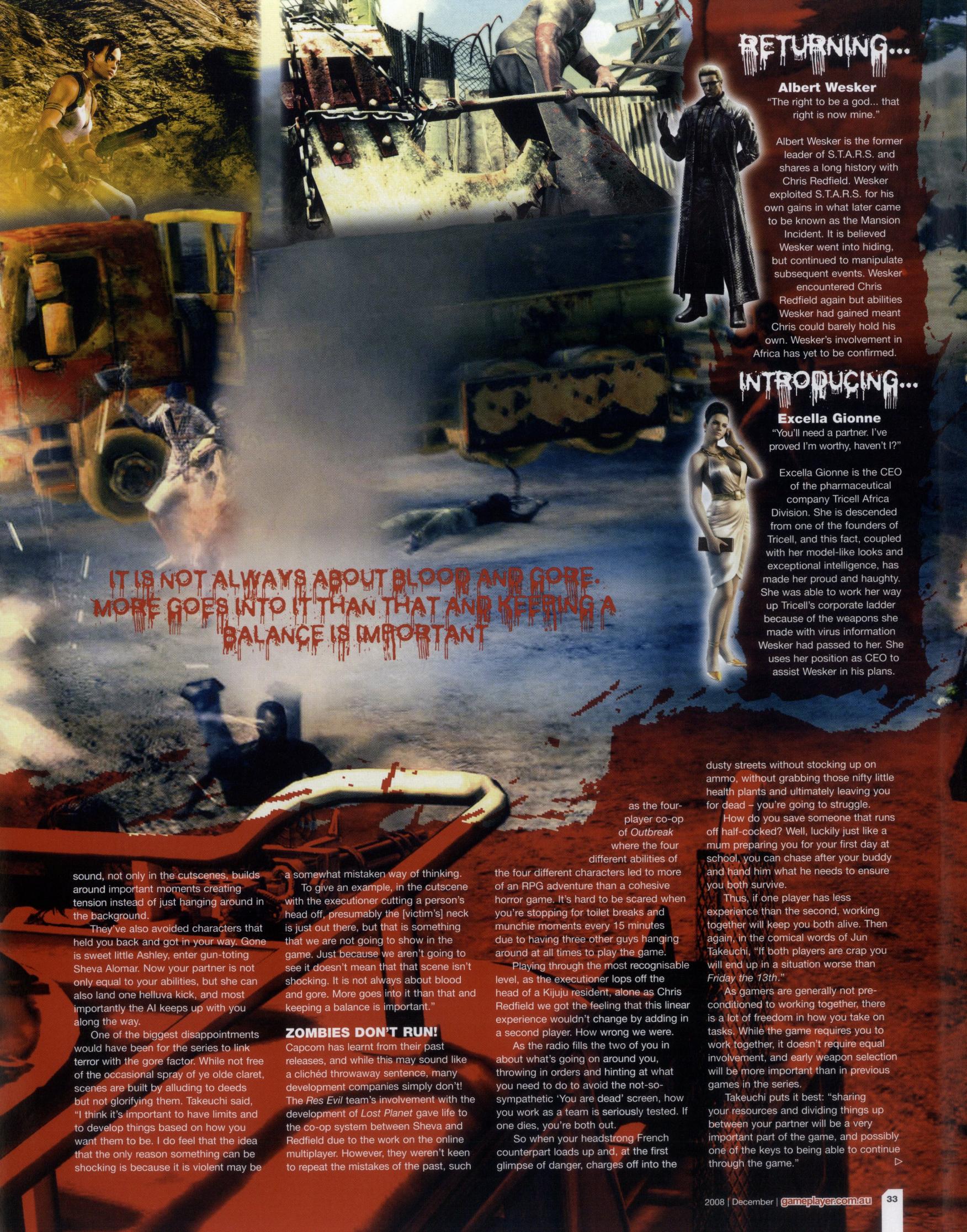
While many may just see this as a sign of the times, Jun Takeuchi says that the alternative controls came about due to the success of the *Resident Evil* movies worldwide. "The decision to introduce the new control scheme is something we took in fairly late into the development of *Resident Evil 5*. The main reason we decided to put it into the game was actually due to the *Resident Evil* movies. We were watching the movies thinking that there are probably a lot of people out there now that know of the game, and might want to play the game, but would be put off by a difficult

or older control scheme, our traditional control scheme for the game."

While it's not yet known whether you'll be able to switch between control systems, or even if the controls will be used throughout the whole game, this movement forward is likely to leave those eager to dismiss the game snivelling as they line up to score their copy in 2009.

STAND UP AND BE COUNTED

While heaping praise on previous games in the series, the team were happy to share the improvements they were eager to make to their own chapter in the series. The changes in the cinematics are glaringly obvious. Utilising a high end machine to ensure motion capture was properly executed, and working with the lighting to capture the correct amount of light to shadow, makes this game stunning to look at. Next to this the



RETURNING...

Albert Wesker

"The right to be a god... that right is now mine."

Albert Wesker is the former leader of S.T.A.R.S. and shares a long history with Chris Redfield. Wesker exploited S.T.A.R.S. for his own gains in what later came to be known as the Mansion Incident. It is believed Wesker went into hiding, but continued to manipulate subsequent events. Wesker encountered Chris Redfield again but abilities Wesker had gained meant Chris could barely hold his own. Wesker's involvement in Africa has yet to be confirmed.

INTRODUCING...

Excella Gionne

"You'll need a partner. I've proved I'm worthy, haven't I?"

Excella Gionne is the CEO of the pharmaceutical company Tricell Africa Division. She is descended from one of the founders of Tricell, and this fact, coupled with her model-like looks and exceptional intelligence, has made her proud and haughty. She was able to work her way up Tricell's corporate ladder because of the weapons she made with virus information Wesker had passed to her. She uses her position as CEO to assist Wesker in his plans.

sound, not only in the cutscenes, builds around important moments creating tension instead of just hanging around in the background.

They've also avoided characters that held you back and got in your way. Gone is sweet little Ashley, enter gun-toting Sheva Alomar. Now your partner is not only equal to your abilities, but she can also land one helluva kick, and most importantly the AI keeps up with you along the way.

One of the biggest disappointments would have been for the series to link terror with the gore factor. While not free of the occasional spray of ye olde claret, scenes are built by alluding to deeds but not glorifying them. Takeuchi said, "I think it's important to have limits and to develop things based on how you want them to be. I do feel that the idea that the only reason something can be shocking is because it is violent may be

a somewhat mistaken way of thinking.

To give an example, in the cutscene with the executioner cutting a person's head off, presumably the [victim's] neck is just out there, but that is something that we are not going to show in the game. Just because we aren't going to see it doesn't mean that that scene isn't shocking. It is not always about blood and gore. More goes into it than that and keeping a balance is important."

ZOMBIES DON'T RUN!

Capcom has learnt from their past releases, and while this may sound like a clichéd throwaway sentence, many development companies simply don't! The *Resident Evil* team's involvement with the development of *Lost Planet* gave life to the co-op system between Sheva and Redfield due to the work on the online multiplayer. However, they weren't keen to repeat the mistakes of the past, such

as the four-player co-op of *Outbreak* where the four different abilities of

the four different characters led to more of an RPG adventure than a cohesive horror game. It's hard to be scared when you're stopping for toilet breaks and munchie moments every 15 minutes due to having three other guys hanging around at all times to play the game.

Playing through the most recognisable level, as the executioner lops off the head of a Kijuju resident, alone as Chris Redfield we got the feeling that this linear experience wouldn't change by adding in a second player. How wrong we were.

As the radio fills the two of you in about what's going on around you, throwing in orders and hinting at what you need to do to avoid the not-so-sympathetic 'You are dead' screen, how you work as a team is seriously tested. If one dies, you're both out.

So when your headstrong French counterpart loads up and, at the first glimpse of danger, charges off into the

dusty streets without stocking up on ammo, without grabbing those nifty little health plants and ultimately leaving you for dead – you're going to struggle.

How do you save someone that runs off half-cocked? Well, luckily just like a mum preparing you for your first day at school, you can chase after your buddy and hand him what he needs to ensure you both survive.

Thus, if one player has less experience than the second, working together will keep you both alive. Then again, in the comical words of Jun Takeuchi, "If both players are crap you will end up in a situation worse than *Friday the 13th*."

As gamers are generally not preconditioned to working together, there is a lot of freedom in how you take on tasks. While the game requires you to work together, it doesn't require equal involvement, and early weapon selection will be more important than in previous games in the series.

Takeuchi puts it best: "sharing your resources and dividing things up between your partner will be a very important part of the game, and possibly one of the keys to being able to continue through the game." ▶



THEY WON'T STAY DEAD

Whipping out the new controls wasn't the only thing that got the blood pumping! While it isn't enough that those zombie bastards give chase on foot, they've now learnt how to drive a shift stick and work in tandem to take you down.

Resident Evil 5 throws you a pimped-out Hummer-like vehicle, equipped with the best machinery that the African desert can provide. Then the zombies come at you: they've got motorbikes, they've got trucks and some crazy has picked up a school bus and packed it full of the braindead. But how braindead can they be? They're throwing axes, they're throwing farming implements, and you need to hang on and shoot, shoot, shoot!

Problem is your gun isn't the most high tech of implements, so it is going to jam. So, much like the limited ammo of the foot battles, this extended segment of road rage will require tactical intelligence.

When Molotov cocktails explode they throw your vehicle drastically off course, initially limiting your ability to pick off individual targets. It's during times like this that you'll need to focus your attentions on larger vehicles, such as trucks and

buses, and aim for even bigger explosions to take out the peripheral enemies.

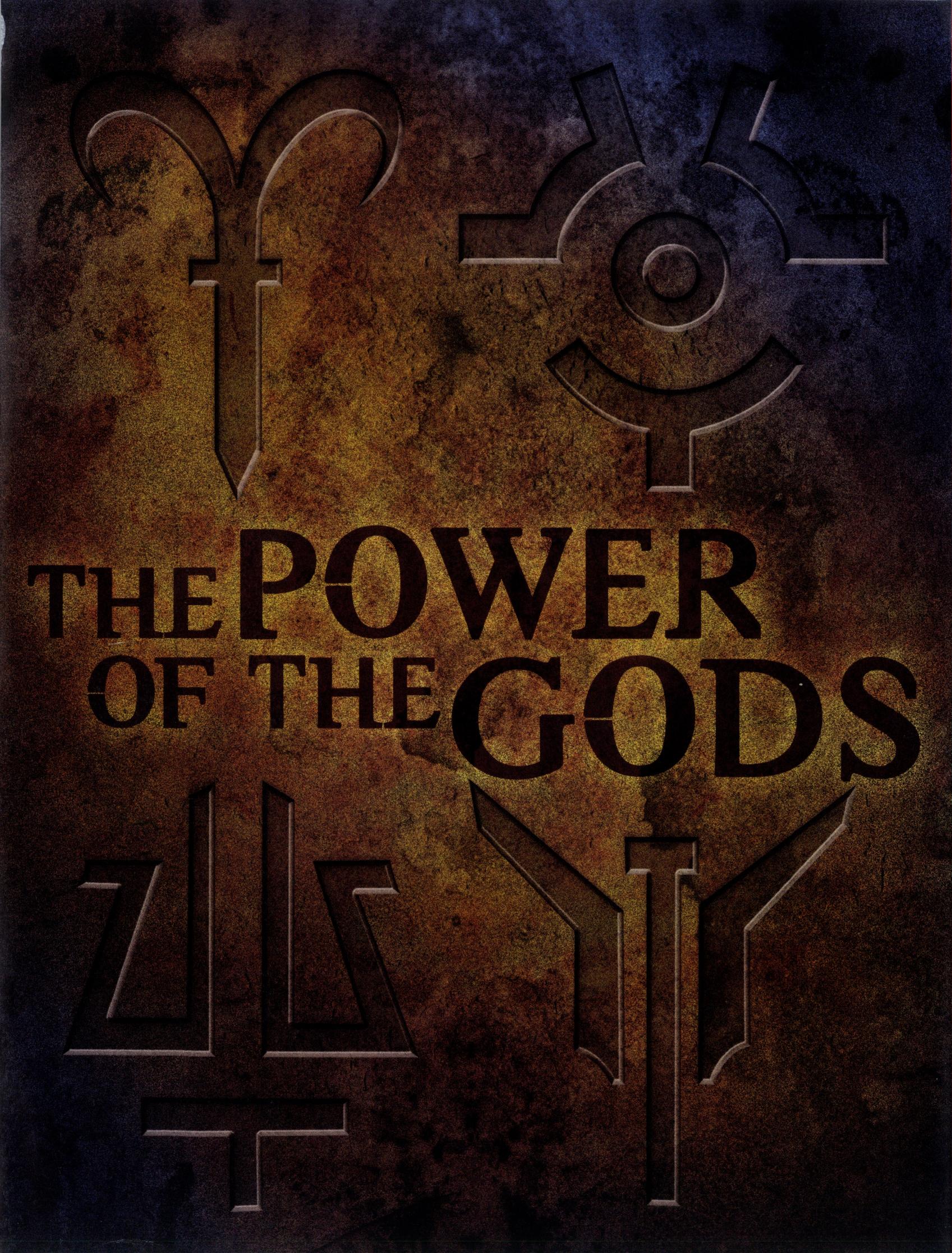
IS IT THE END?

Resident Evil 5 will draw together many of the mysteries and strange story paths featured in previous entries into the series. With many recurring characters, more than a hint that modes like the awesome 'Mercenaries' will return and a rare sighting of a vulture, possibly bearing gold, we're anticipating that *Resident Evil 5* will catch the attention of more than just hardcore gamers, spreading the *RE* love throughout the gaming community. While *Resident Evil 4* won nearly 100 accolades including numerous Game of the Year awards, *Resident Evil 5* will be accessible, have a coherent and intriguing storyline and is guaranteed to make more than a few people need to change their panties in shame. But will this chapter be the last for Chris and his cohorts? We can't wait to find out... 

FINAL EVIL!

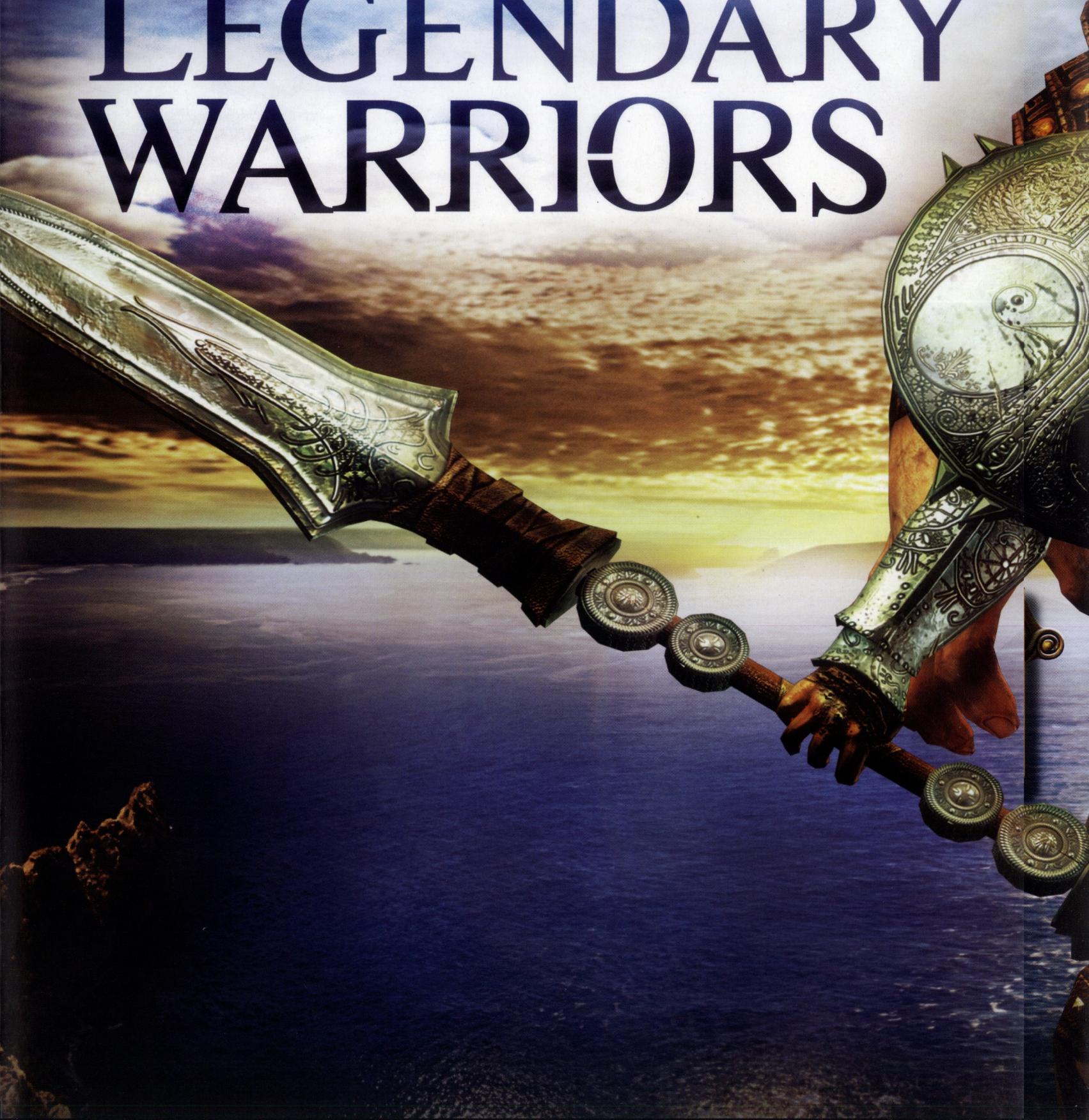
What the *RE5* team wants to say to you!

"What we would like to say to fans of the series is to brush up on past *Resident Evil* games and know everything that is going on with the story, even *Code Veronica*. We can't say exactly why, but that might be one thing that they'll want to do before the game comes out!"



THE POWER OF THE GODS

THE FORCE OF LEGENDARY WARRIORS







THE COURAGE OF A HERO.

"One of the most anticipated RPG's of 2008"

- IGN

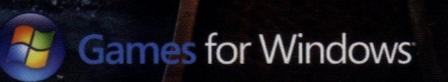
RISE OF THE ARGONAUTS™



OUT OCTOBER 2008
riseoftheargonauts.net



PLAYSTATION 3



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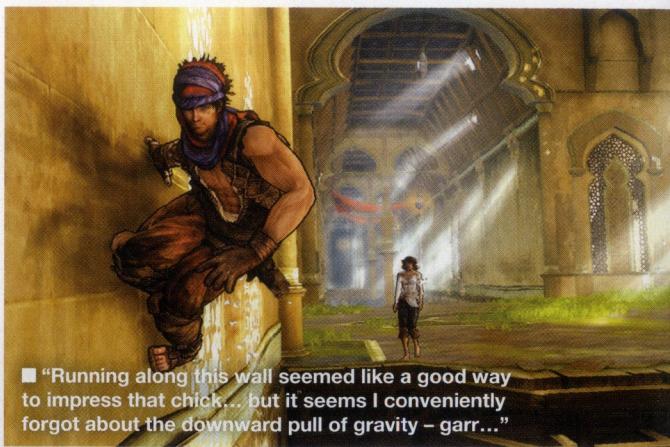
EXCLUSIVE looks at the very best

PREVIEWS

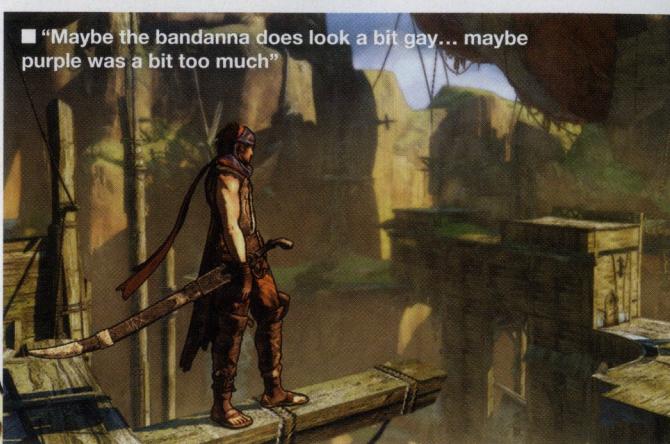
PS3 PS2 PSP

■ GENRE: ACTION
■ PLAYERS: 1
■ RELEASE: NOVEMBER 2008
■ DISTRIBUTOR: UBISOFT
■ DEVELOPER: UBISOFT
■ WEB: www.prince-of-persia.ubi.com

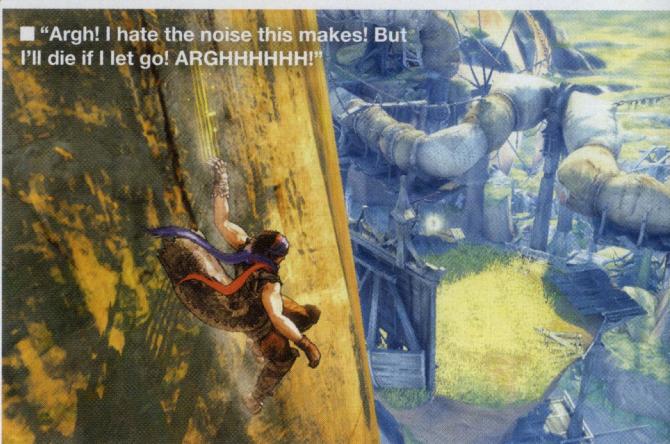
■ "If you do it with a glove it feels like someone else is doing it!"



■ "Running along this wall seemed like a good way to impress that chick... but it seems I conveniently forgot about the downward pull of gravity - garr..."



■ "Maybe the bandanna does look a bit gay... maybe purple was a bit too much"



■ "Argh! I hate the noise this makes! But I'll die if I let go! ARGHHHHHH!"

PRINCE OF PERSIA

Flipping the script

If this generation could be defined by a single colour it would undoubtedly be 'shitty brown'. WWII shooters, *Killzone 2*, *MGS4*, *GTA IV* – all the AAA titles released on current gen platforms to date have featured the kind of colour palette usually prevalent in your local public toilet, to the extent that the generic art design plaguing games as of late not only looks like a glorified turd bucket, it's starting to smell like one too.

Thankfully this whole aesthetic seems on the cusp of change – a number of games due for release, both this year and into 2009, seem to have (gasp) actually discovered colour, with titles such as

Mirror's Edge and *LBP* moving as far away from grim, brown, rain-stained textures as humanly possible, towards something far more vibrant.

And leading this bold charge towards colour is the all-new, revamped *Prince of Persia* from Ubisoft.

IT'S 'PURRTY'

You probably know the story so far – Ubisoft have taken their celebrated franchise and hit the reboot button, at least in terms of style. The development team have, for some reason, told us to not refer to the art design as 'cel-shaded', but (shhh...) the game is *kinda* cel-

shaded, just with more detail than ever before seen with this style.

The character model of the Prince himself is a perfect case in point – believe it or not the Prince actually features even more polygonal wankery than Altair in *Assassin's Creed*, and makes an absolute mockery of the belief that cel-shaded games are lesser technical achievements – which is the kind of short-sighted thinking that probably forced Ubi to constantly try and distance itself from the first place.

To be fair, though, the term 'illustrative' (which Ubisoft prefers we use) is probably a better description. Ben Mattes, the

project lead on *Prince of Persia*, claimed that so many fans wrote in to talk about how cool the previous gen *Prince of Persia* artwork was, that the team decided to make the actual entire game look like said artwork.

SMOOTH CRIMINAL

But, after watching the game in motion, it's the animation itself that really impresses. Every single *Prince of Persia* game, since the very first release almost 20 years ago, has made leaps and bounds in terms of character movement, and this iteration is no exception.

Courtesy of a slick frame rate, every



INFO BYTE

The 'Prince' in *Prince of Persia* apparently isn't actually a 'Prince' yet, merely a 'Prince' to be. Did we use the word 'Prince' too much there? Prince... Prince... Prince... Prince...



■ "Damn those lunges are impressive..."



INSPIRED

While *Prince of Persia* does its fair share of innovating, it does take some inspiration from some of last generation's best titles.



Okami

Borrows from *Okami* its 'transforming the dark possessed world into an enormous flowery paradise' gimmick.



Ico

Borrows its crazy black life-sucking ooze, and reverses its ingenious team dynamic.



Soulcalibur

Apparently its fighting mechanics were a huge inspiration for the *Prince of Persia* team.

"the greatest achievement in terms of the game design itself, comes in the form of Elika..."

single movement the Prince makes is oozing with vibrancy and, more importantly, no matter what beguiling movements are being performed, whether it be spider monkeying scrambles along an *actual* ceiling, or intangible leaps across cliff faces, every single frame of animation seems to represent the desired movement perfectly – and somehow seem not only possible, but perfectly viable, and almost commonplace within the superlative framework of the *Prince of Persia* universe.

INTRODUCING ELIKA...

But, as far as we can see, the greatest achievement in terms of the game design itself, comes in the form of Elika – the

Prince's guide and spiritual aide.

Whereas secondary characters, or 'escort' missions, have been frequently cursed in the short history of videogaming, Elika may just be the first 'buddy' that you'll actually be thankful for.

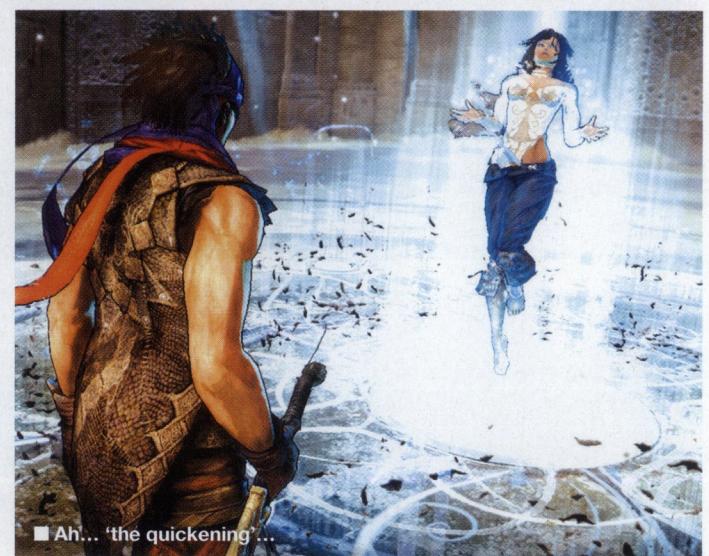
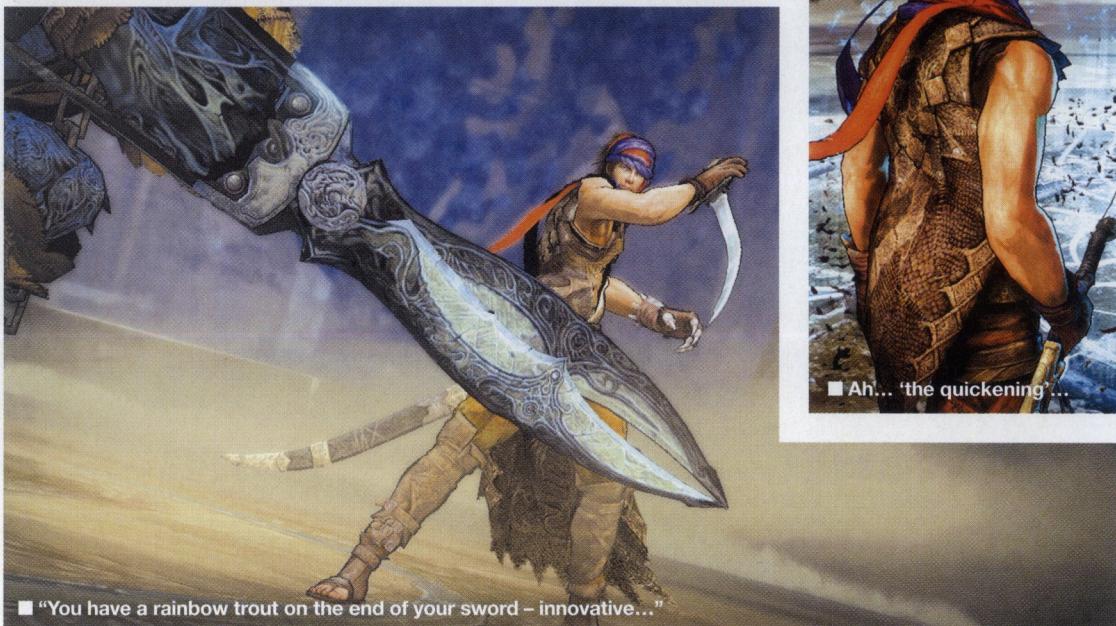
Some of you will remember the forgotten PS2 classic *Ico*, and guiding the perennially useless Yorda through an empty castle fortress. Well, in *Prince of Persia* you play the role of the annoyingly crap Yorda, and it'll be Elika holding your hand through the whole experience.

If you fall into the black ooze that plagues the land, it'll be Elika who pulls you out from the brink. If you stumble and career headfirst into the abyss, Elika will grab your hand and pull you to

safety. When you're getting your guts rearranged by a possessed beast from the depths of hell, Elika will be your tag team partner.

Not once will she get in your way – only aid you in your quest.

And it's in the smaller touches that the relationship between the Prince is developed, creating a fresh layer of immersion amongst all the usual *PoP* acrobatics. The two exchange pleasantries as they shimmy between each other across extreme precipices, and a 'conversation button' allows the Prince to talk to Elika at any time he chooses. The interactions are perfectly natural and, best of all, completely unobtrusive.



DANCING ON THE CEILING

One of the most eye-catching moments we've seen thus far in *Prince of Persia* is undoubtedly the insane 'ceiling running' that the Prince somehow manages to partake in. Yes, it doesn't make one iota of sense, and yes, gravity does not stand for such shenanigans, but still – if this is wrong we don't wanna be right. As the all-knowing Lionel Richie once eloquently stated: "oh, what a feeling, when we're dancing on the ceiling". Yes Mr Richie – what a feeling indeed.

FISTICUFFS

Whereas last generation's *PoP* titles almost brushed over the brilliant duelling aspect of the original *Prince of Persia*, the new iteration has brought it back with gusto, creating an interesting new mechanic that renders each enemy a worthy opponent, as opposed to a flimsy game-extender that can be easily defeated via 'ye olde' button bash.

Because this time round Ubisoft have spent a lot of resources on getting the combat right – and as far as we can tell, it's been money/time well spent. Taking their cue from one-on-one fighters such as *Soulcalibur* (instead of trying to 'out war' *God of War*) *Prince of Persia* has successfully created a mechanic that focuses less on the repetition of beating on several foes, and more upon the dramatics of the epic duel.

Tightly executed counters, precise combos (that include Elika), and cinematic power struggles are all present and correct in the fighting system, resulting in an experience that is far more rewarding than most other action games on the market. In the brief demo we partook in, we chased a particularly resilient beastie across an entire map, over three separate epic encounters, before he called shenanigans, turned tail and ran. The fight may have lacked the epic scale of *God of War*, but made up for it with the drama of the whole situation. We dug it.

Overall, *PoP* is a game that seems intent on doing everything differently. Those dastardly poo-brown colours have been replaced with a refreshing burst of colour, button bashing has been

replaced with rewarding precision, and the Prince himself is on the receiving end of an escort mission where you yourself are the escortee. With *PoP* Ubisoft seem intent on flipping the script on every single game cliché of the past three to four years, and we can't get enough of it. Bravo. **Mark Serrels**

BOTTOM LINE

- Vibrant design
- Super smooth
- Great combat

OPS IS...

On the ceiling





LANDING IS HARD.

FLYING IS EASY.



PURE



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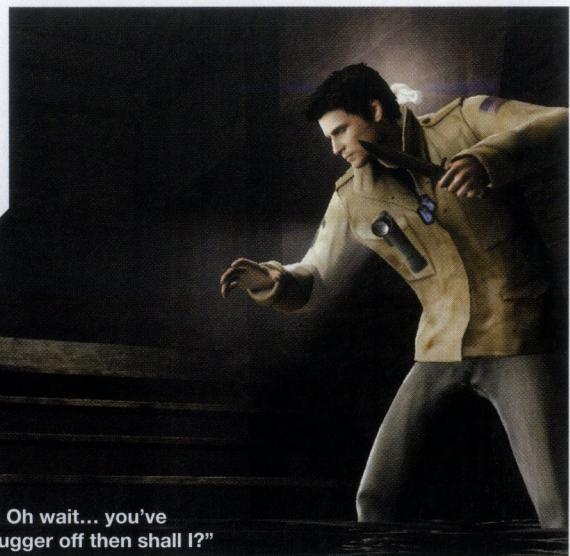
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PS3 PS2 PSP PREVIEW

■ GENRE: ACTION
■ PLAYERS: 1
■ RELEASE: NOVEMBER 2008
■ DISTRIBUTOR: ATARI
■ DEVELOPER: KONAMI
■ WEB: www.konami.com.au



■ "I'm gonna rip you a new arsehole! Oh wait... you've already got one. Okay then, I'll just bugger off then shall I?"

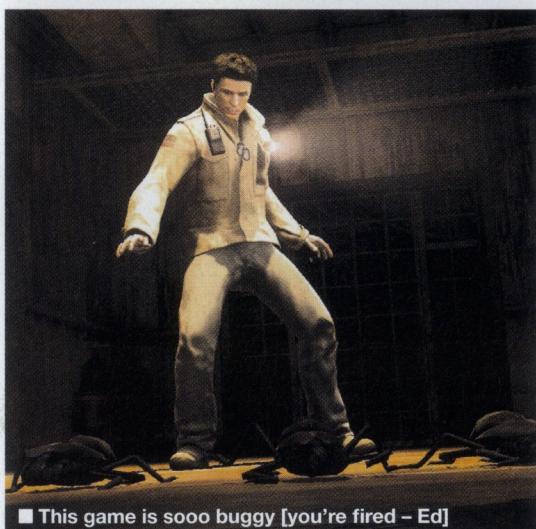


INFO BYTE

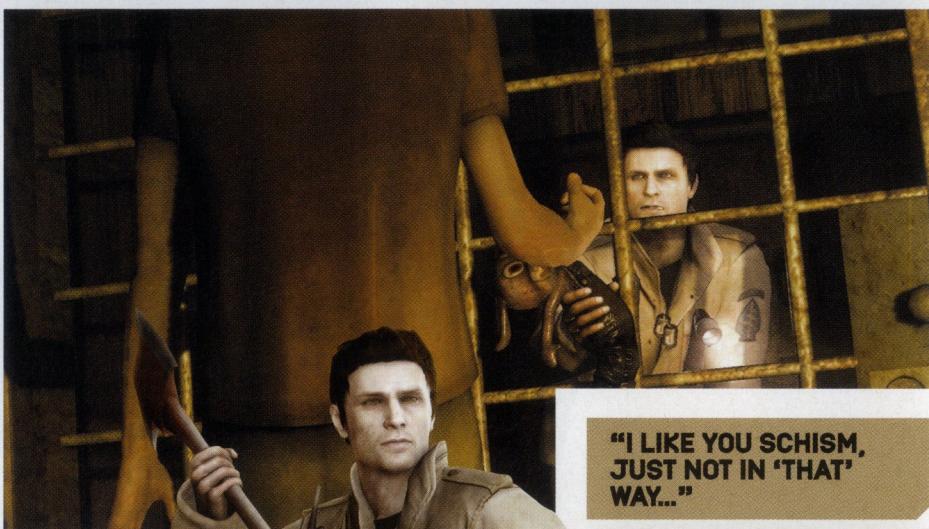
Silent Hill: The Room - thought by many to be the worst in the series - was originally a game that had nothing to do with SH. At all. It was taken and remade to fit with the SH mythos.



■ "Hey... you've got a party mouth"
"Okay dokey, I'll be leaving now"



■ This game is sooo buggy [you're fired - Ed]



SILENT HILL: HOMECOMING

Like Rooty Hill but with fewer hideous monsters

The name *Silent Hill* used to mean something. Not literally; it doesn't refer to some taciturn embankment - rather it conjures images of fleetingly glimpsed horrors, twitching, screeching beasts, fever dream logic, dark apprehension and impending doom.

Basically some very scary, nasty stuff.

Resident Evil has the gunplay and science-run-amok bizzo, while *Silent Hill* deals with more cerebral themes.

Resident Evil is a loving homage to films like *Dawn of the Dead* then *Silent Hill* is Clive Barker's *Hellraiser*.

The Hills are alive... OH GOD! They really ARE ALIVE! ARGH!

The Hill has been, well... not silent, but a bit quiet for a while. There was the fairly average movie and a superior PSP prequel, *Silent Hill: Origins*, but gamers wanted SH on the PS3, dammit! We got the preview copy and had a bash. *Silent Hill: Homecoming* is a throwback to

vintage *Hill*. It reminds one of *Silent Hill 2* with its use of amnesia as a plot device and the slow, drip-feed narrative regarding some horrible family secret involving your younger brother.

That's all we're going to tell you about the plot but we will tell you about the monsters and the gameplay.

Is Pyramid Head back? We like the Pyramid Head [nod].

Yes, ol' Pyramid head is back and so are the eerie nurses, but beyond that the monsters have been kicked up a gear. Ash coloured humanoids shoot poison gas at you from their exposed, heaving lungs, something with talons lurks in the knee-high water of your mother's basement ready to scratch your guts out, skinless dogs snap at your feet and you should prepare to have uncomfortably homoerotic encounters with a nasty breed named Schism. Plus the bosses. Oh my, the bosses bring it like no other *Hill*.

Now this could have been a downfall. Other SH's have used 'running away like a little girl' as the game's main tactic, but not anymore. Now you can use weak attack, strong attack, counter attack, roll out of the way, get behind your opponent, duck, weave and so on.

It's not easy, the game's revved up the creatures so the improved combat mechanic works against the improved monsters, but still they finally got around to making the combat fun! Not to mention the fact that when you hit, say, a nasty nurse with an axe she'll actually have a wound where you struck her.

Plus there's an array of finishing moves - including a rather tasty decapitation. *Silent Hill: Homecoming* is looking set to be a deliciously gruesome treat. We're a little worried that the gameplay may be too similar to other *Hills*, but this one's definitely on our 'must have' list. **■ Anthony O'Connor**

"I LIKE YOU SCHISM, JUST NOT IN 'THAT' WAY..."

Out of the entire menagerie of monsters in *Silent Hill: Homecoming*, we'd have to rate Schism as one of the best, but also... um, a little bit uncomfortable. They have the body of a naked man, a head that looks like giant, fleshy scissors and, erm... their 'man parts' seem to be a remote control of some kind. Bags not changing the channel!



BOTTOM LINE

- Creepy, slimy monsters! YAY!
- Sleek combat
- Simplistic gameplay

OPS IS...

Saying 'Hill yeah!'



PS3 PS2 PSP PREVIEW

■ GENRE: ACTION
■ PLAYERS: 1
■ RELEASE: TBA 2008
■ DISTRIBUTOR: ATARI
■ DEVELOPER: CRYSTAL DYNAMICS
■ WEB: www.tombraiderunderworld.com

INFO BYTE

Women's gymnastics champ and stunchnick Heidi Moneymaker was motion captured to within a millimetre (approximately) of her undies to provide Lara's new moves.



TOMB RAIDER: UNDERWORLD

She's got a ponytail!

Yep, the number two cause of body image issues in young girls (that ageless beeyatch Barbie still ranks numero uno) is preparing a triumphant, pointy return to being pushed around by the DualShocked masses. But this time, the chesty chick that could ONLY have been designed by a computer geek has changed! Uh-huh, she's ditched the blue singlet and khaki shorts in favour of a brown halter top and black dacks. You've come a long way, baby...

Mercifully, after a few ups and downs (mostly down as of late) in the *Tomb Raider* franchise over recent years, buff archaeologist Ms Croft's first sortie into PS3dom – and her eighth overall – is showing more and more promise as we shimmy ever nearer to its release.

Story-wise, she of the pneumatic boobies is on an expedition to find the mythical Thor's hammer, which she'll be needing in order to take out a God. This quest may have an alarming side effect, however, like causing her to unleash

a dormant superpower that could put the kibosh on civilisation as we know it. Which, let's be honest here, would kind of completely suck.

Control-wise, previous *Tomb Raider* incarnations saw Lara's various actions quite separated – she'd climb, or she'd shoot, or she'd puzzle, etc – however a big selling point as she goes next-gen is that we're in for a more seamless, 'realistic', adventuring experience. Finally, after all these years Ms Croft has learned the ancient art of multitasking!

The screen area has been given a decent Dysoning too, with all those flashy arrows and stuff given the flick. It's all part of the attempt to make controlling Ms Croft as instinctive as humanly possible. The theory is that if you think she should be able to do something, you'll be able to make it so. Uh, within reason, guys... within reason, OK?

Sure we took the piss out of her slight makeover back there, but there's more to it than a long overdue strip from

those manky old threads and mastering the art of the scrunchie to go all ponytail-powered. Fresh motion-capping has resulted in new moves being added to the arsenal and, as you'd rightfully expect, a much-improved fluidity of movement that borders on realistic. We're not in 'ChunkyPolygonLand' anymore, Toto.

Not only is this evident in the Croftster, but also in the environments in which she gets to rough, tumble and grunt. Eidos aren't messing around, with level one slam-dunking our buoyant heroine into the Mediterranean to battle everything from sharks to a bloody great kraken. The water effects look stunning, as do later levels where Ms Croft gets frigid tootsies in the frozen islands of the Arctic or battles tigers and – wait for it – lizardmen in the Thai jungle.

We've been burned by the *TR* franchise previously, so we're not turning super-anticipatory cartwheels for *Underworld*. But this one does promise lizardmen... **– Amy Flower**

YOU BROKE IT, YOU BOUGHT IT

One of the funky things about *Tomb Raider: Underworld* is that the environments are built around a real world ethic, in that stuff you do now stays done. Huh? Simple, pimple! You remember how Homer clodhopped a fish with his time travelling toaster and the future changed? Well, it's not really like that at all. But, say if Lara busts down a tree, it'll stay busted – hello convenient landmark! Or, if she corpse somebody up in the jungle, their cadaver will stay where it carked it. Well, at least until something predatory and peckish happens along, we guess...



BOTTOM LINE

Brand new game engine
 A classic reborn?
 Lara's chequered past

OPS IS...
bustyl



PS3 PS2 PSP PREVIEW

■ GENRE: ACTION
■ PLAYERS: 1
■ RELEASE: TBA
■ DISTRIBUTOR: SONY
■ DEVELOPER: SONY
■ WEB: au.playstation.com



■ "Ever watch that movie *The Jungle Book*? Yeah, I know it's shit, right?"

STAMPEDE!

You can only get so close to the animals in *Afrika* before, depending on their nature, they either run away or charge at you and leave you concussed. In the latter instance, the screen goes black after a cutscene showing that you were spotted and were about to be stampeded, before cutting to another sequence back at camp where you find yourself being nursed by your photojournalist colleague. And there's no way you can harm the animals in *Afrika*, so don't even think about asking if there are any shotguns here.



AFRIKA

I bless the rains

The first time we saw *Afrika* on one of Sony's showreels we were sceptical that the footage could be implemented in a real game, but here we are, a year on, and *Afrika* is a reality. Currently it's only available in Japan – and there's no confirmation of if/when we're likely to see an Australian release – but our hands-on time with *Afrika* tells us it has clear crossover potential. Quirky Japanese game this ain't.

Probably the biggest question people have been asking about *Afrika* is, "What do you do in the game?" The answer is pretty simple: you take lots and lots of photographs. Okay, there's more to it than that, but your skills behind the camera are what push the game forward. Playing as either Eric or Anna, photojournalists on safari together in deepest Africa, you receive assignments via email.

These missions are invariably centred on photographic challenges – photograph a cheetah as it hunts a gazelle, for instance, or snap a yawning hippo – and your efforts are then graded according to such things as how good the angle, distance and focus are. Well-taken photos earn a 'Cleared' stamp of approval and, more importantly, some prize money. The cash you earn can then be used to buy items such as new camera accessories and camping equipment for future missions.

In terms of control, once you leave your base, you're initially just a passenger in a Suzuki Jeep driven by a safari guide called James. You can tell him to stop driving at any point, though, and you can leave the Jeep and take a walk. The default view when you're on foot is pitched behind your character in

a third-person adventure style, but you can choose to play from a first-person view instead, which we reckon enhances the sense of realism (it also improves the frame rate a bit). After a couple of hours of play, you get to drive the Suzuki yourself. Map reading skills become crucial because of the nature of *Afrika's* vast open areas.

The biggest reason to be excited about *Afrika* is how good it looks, but it's by no means technically perfect. The draw distance is one of the most impressive aspects of the game engine, as the environments stretch as far as the eye expects to see.

Even more spectacular is the wildlife, with every animal animated in an uncannily lifelike way and coated in hi-res textures that stand up to even the closest of inspections. On the other

hand, the frame rate can be quite jittery in places and terrain textures too low-res and stretched. Still, the overall effect of *Afrika*'s graphics is pretty awesome, showing off a tremendous amount of the PS3's power. But if there's an *Afrika 2* a few years down the line, there will be room for improvement. **Jonti Davies**

BOTTOM LINE

- Fantastic textures
- Incredible draw distance
- Jittery frame rate

OPS IS...

A Tiger! Rar!



PS3 PS2 PSP PREVIEW

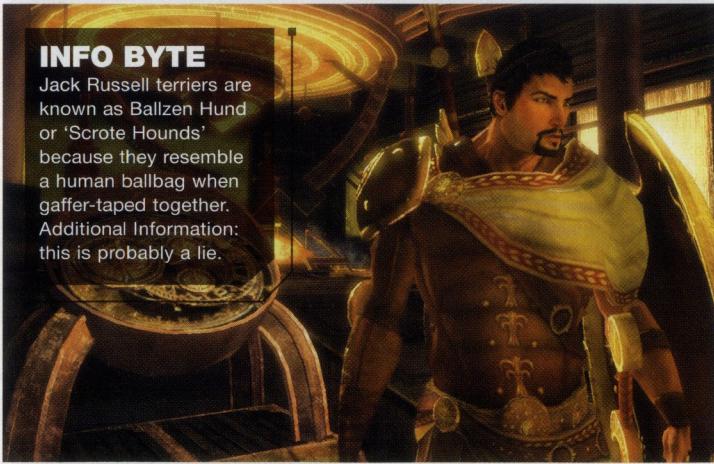
■ GENRE: ACTION
■ PLAYERS: 1-TBA
■ RELEASE: OCTOBER 2008
■ DISTRIBUTOR: ATARI
■ DEVELOPER: LIQUID ENT
■ WEB: www.liquidentertainment.net



■ "What I wouldn't give to be grasped in the strong embrace of Hercules. I mean... look at those guns!"



■ "That's for saying I look like George Michael..."



INFO BYTE

Jack Russell terriers are known as Ballzen Hund or 'Scrote Hounds' because they resemble a human ballbag when gaffer-taped together. Additional Information: this is probably a lie.

RISE OF THE ARGONAUTS

Come Argonauts – let's go be Argo-naughty!

It seems to us that one would need balls the size of several Jack Russell terriers gaffer-taped together, or a stellar title, to use Greek mythology as a backdrop for a new videogame.

After all, you're messing with the big dog, *God of War*. Available on both the PS2 and PSP - plus there's a sexy looking next-gen PS3 entry on the way, you have to wonder: what game would dare to stand up to the almighty Kratos?

How the hell should we know?

That's right, *Rise of the Argonauts* (or *ROTA* as it shall now be known) is a mixed bag of genres, to be honest. There's the third person combat, using a pretty sweet (albeit derivative) block/slash/special move system - replete with spears, swords and spiked maces - and, later in the game, magic.

Plus some classification board-unfriendly finishing moves like body-chopped-in-half, decapitations and skull crushing, to name but three.

Okay, so cool combat isn't anything new. Hell, *Heavenly Sword*, *Devil May Cry* and the aforementioned *GoW* series have some of the best combat around. What can *ROTA* bring to the mix that'll cause punters to part with their hard-earned cash?

WE. DON'T. KNOW. Why do you keep asking me stuff I don't know ANYTHING about?! We're calling the cops!

ROTA makes a courageous call and we find that what initially appears to be yet another sword-and-sandal affair is actually an RPG. You have maps and territories - you can meet people and a) kill them, b) chat with them, c) buy or sell goods and activate side quests and d)

erm, chat with them some more.

At this stage *ROTA* is very buggy. The graphics are sporadic, textures vanish and sometimes characters walk on air - and not the supernatural ones that are supposed to walk on air.

Having said that, once engaged in a mission, things get more interesting.

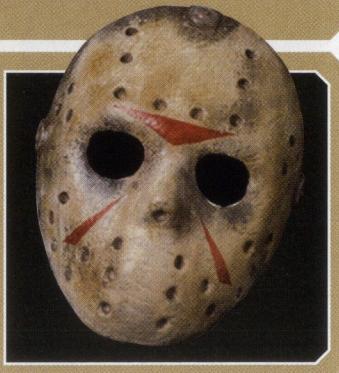
Often partnered up with brick-pooouse-shaped Hercules, you do tend to converse to people. A lot. During which you pick a reply. Narky if you feel like a fight and friendly if you don't - sadly there's no "Less talk, more stabby stabby" conversational gambit, so you will suffer through some pretty awful voice acting.

Now you are in the mission... although the starting point is bloody ages away. However, when you start facing giant monsters and evil witches the game ratchets up the good and the earlier hours of tedium are all but forgotten.

ROTA is, with any luck, a diamond in the rough. Currently buggy and glitchy, we hope the title gets polished, because there's a really cool game buried under all that exposition and wandering around like a dickhead. **Anthony O' Connor**

MYTHS AND MONSTERS

It's interesting that a lot of the Greek Gods remain such a popular subject today. It helps us understand the culture. Imagine what people will think of our culture a few hundred years on? They'll discover our Jason, Mr Voorhees of the *Friday the 13th* series, Chucky, Pinhead, Michael Myers and Freddy Krueger being thought of as "ancient 21st century Gods" - now that would be funny. Pity we'll all be dead and unable to laugh at it. Stupid death.



BOTTOM LINE

- Epic environment
- Fearsome foes and lots to do
- Still rough at this stage

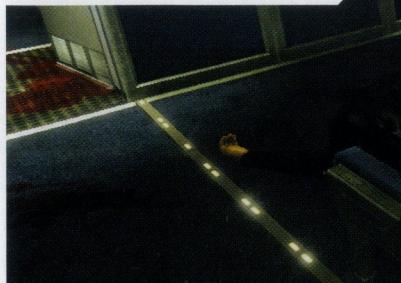
OPS IS...

Patiently waiting!

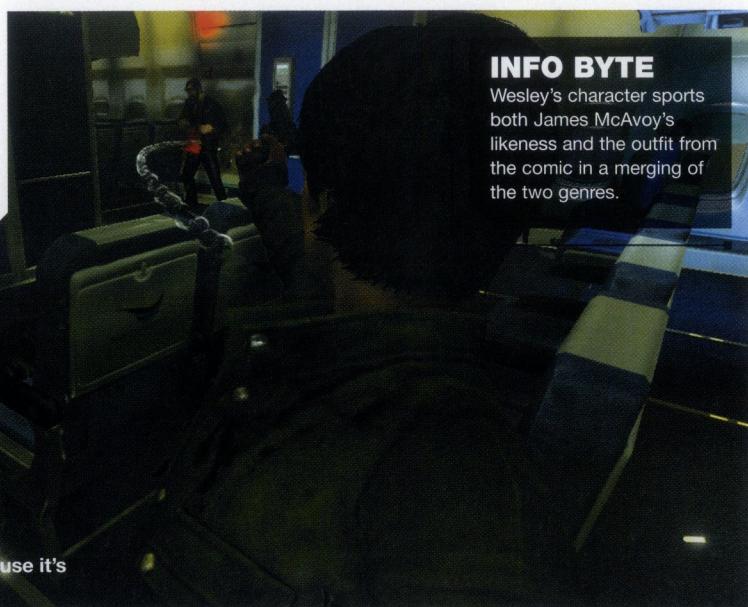


PS3 PS2 PSP PREVIEW

■ GENRE: ACTION
■ PLAYERS: 1-TBA
■ RELEASE: TBA
■ DISTRIBUTOR: WARNER BROS
■ DEVELOPER: GRIN
■ WEB: www.wbfb.com



■ Why not just shoot straight? Because it's not as cool – that's why!

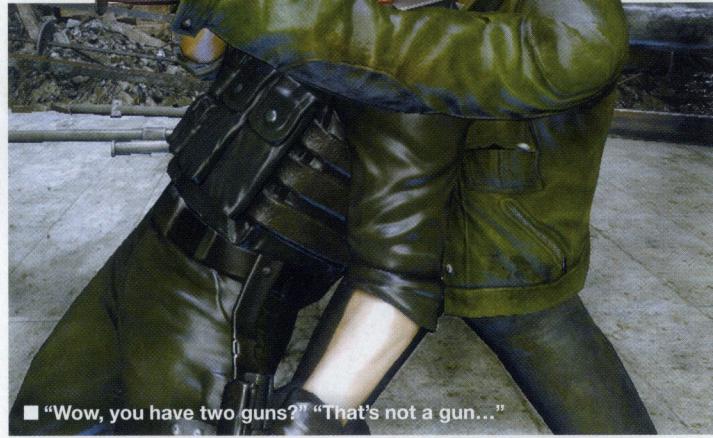


INFO BYTE

Wesley's character sports both James McAvoy's likeness and the outfit from the comic in a merging of the two genres.

CREATIVE DIFFERENCE

Anyone familiar with the *Wanted* graphic novel will know that the film bears very little resemblance to the original. In an effort to co-exist in the same world, the videogame will take cues from both the film and the comic and become some sort of hybrid of the two. Usually fated to be a steaming pile of crap, this one is looking pretty good so far, if they stick to their guns.



■ "Wow, you have two guns?" "That's not a gun..."

WANTED: WEAPONS OF FATE

Ready to tempt fate?

Now before you all skip past this page and move onto the next one to get to a funny O'Connor-ism, some Serrels gold, Ellis' wordsmithery or Ness' fan-tas-magorical features, stop for a second and reconsider. Yes, we know it's a movie-based property. Yes, we know they suck harder than a \$5,000 escort and mostly leave you feeling used, but there's a few things you need to know about *Wanted: Weapons of Fate*. Number one, it may be licensed, but it's coming out after the movie, so there's no rushed deadline or opening it needs to be completed for. Two, it's a mesh of the comic and flick, and it really looks the business. C'mon now, take a chance on it, alright?

After getting a view of a few new trailers, we can't front, we got excited.

Those of you who haven't seen the film yet, we're sending Seagal out to bitch-slap you into submission, and force you to. Though the story was as predictable as Britney Spears forgetting to put on underwear, the action was impressive and the visual style of director Timur Bekmambetov was cutting edge and fresh. Happily, this has been transferred into the game.

Taking place literally seconds after the end of the movie, this sequel has our hero Wesley Gibson taking on various other factions of The Fraternity in a shower of bullets, dead bodies and in-your-face encounters. We glimpsed a heated skirmish on an airplane. Wes used trolleys, seats and occasionally bodies, warm or otherwise, to shield himself, shot doors to suck enemies out the airlock and witnessed an advanced

cover mechanic that allows side and top blind-firing. The hand to hand combat is refined, and brutal. Our boy managed to reach over a seat and stab some poor mofa in the throat, before moving on to fricassee anyone still left standing. Grisly and awesome all at once, but the bullet curving was what got our pulses racing.

With their own version of bullet time, Wes can take a pause and line up several shots in a reproduction to the "slowed heat rate" thingy from the film. You can also curve bullets around corners using the analogue sticks. Take a moment to digest that. Curve bullets. Oh what's that homeboy? You're going to hide behind the wall's edge and take pot shots at me? No dice. A little tapperoo, fling some spin and it's a cancelled Christmas for you boyo. It's organic, easy to use and a

whole big bag of fun.

What else can we tell you? It looks good, it plays good, you get to cancel tickets as both Wesley and his legendary father, Cross, and you can pitch bullets... what the hell else do you want from a game? **▲ Dave Kozicki**

BOTTOM LINE

Advanced cover system

Bending bullets!

It's a movie license...

OPS IS...

Shooting stuff



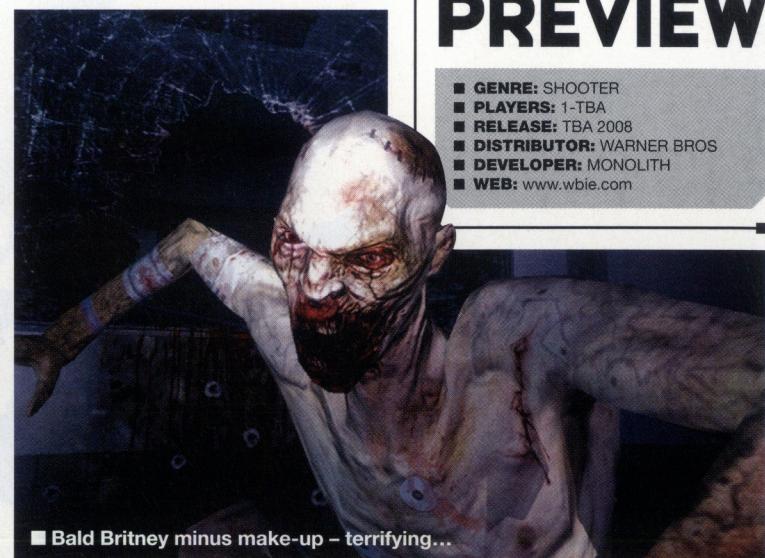
■ GENRE: SHOOTER
■ PLAYERS: 1-TBA
■ RELEASE: TBA 2008
■ DISTRIBUTOR: WARNER BROS
■ DEVELOPER: MONOLITH
■ WEB: www.wbie.com

INFO BYTE

You can hide behind open car doors for cover as well, which is a pretty sweet touch.



■ "Hey man, you got a light?" "Sure thing, bro" BLAM!



■ Bald Britney minus make-up – terrifying...



F.E.A.R. 2: PROJECT ORIGIN

Scared? You will be!

After initial disappointment with the first *F.E.A.R.*, we were still ready to give the sequel the benefit of the doubt, and we're glad we did. This is shaping up to be something different, a little kooky, and altogether spooky.

The graphics were significantly tweaked and tighter from what we'd seen previously. It looked as sexy as Jessica Alba in leather chaps. Once we lifted our jaws off the ground, and cleaned up the pool of dribble we left on WB's floor, we got a chance to play that sucker.

We opened in a city ravaged by war. Buildings had crumbled from the onslaught – it looked like the OPS offices after Friday night drinks, nothing but death and destruction as far as the eye could see. Husks of cars, rubble and debris littered the streets, power lines

were down, roads were split in two, it was a right proper mess. We took our first steps, a few dudes rolled out towards us. We hit bullet time and mowed them down. There's something satisfying about capping some fool in slow motion, watching his limbs involuntarily flail as blood sprays in every direction.

After sending some bad dudes crying home to Momma, we caught a glimpse of a laser sight on us. After a quick bit of fancy footwork, we worked out where he was, switched to our sniper rifle and ventilated his cranium, we're nice like that. We played the level again, and noticed that the enemy rushed us from different positions, and the sniper was set up differently. That was certified cool.

We cleared a path through a movie theatre and saw a mech suit just begging

to be used. It was in a pool of water with active power lines around it. Step in the pool, and it's adios muchacho. You needed to shoot the junction box, and then get in. Lateral thinking, we love it.

Then the shit got real... mechs started landing all over the show. Buses crumbled under their sheer weight as they landed with a thud. Normal soldiers were cut to ribbons by our mini guns and missile launcher, but the mechs needed a touch more discipline, courtesy of our missiles, and just when we thought we'd cleared the area, in pops a massive mech, as the demo draws to a close.

Though not as blood-soaked or creepy as the first one, this is looking like a well-balanced title, and we're looking forward to seeing what else they have in their bag of tricks. **• Dave Kozicki**

NEED A HAND?

One thing that particularly grabbed our attention was when you vaulted over a ledge, or smashed out a window, you actually saw your appendages. Your hand hits the rail as you see your legs vault over a railing and land on the ground, a floor below. This might seem like a small thing, but it's a rarity in an FPS to actually see limbs, as opposed to magically jumping over an obstacle with your hands and gun miraculously hovering in the default position!



BOTTOM LINE

- We love mechs
- Sneaky AI
- Less claustrophobic?

OPS IS...

Still scared





PG

Mild violence

MA
15+

Strong violence

RESTRICTED

The following games are rated PG and MA15+



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STREET FIGHTING MAN

We duke it out with **Yoshinori Ono**, the producer of *Street Fighter IV*

The *Street Fighter* franchise is, for want of a better word, legendary, but in a world where the 3D fighter is king, is the series still relevant? We think so, and we think that it's time that a more precise style of fighting game ruled the genre once more. *Street Fighter IV* is shaping up to be that game – a title that harks back to the accessibility of *SFII*, but remains as in-depth as the underrated *SFIII*. Yoshinori Ono is the great mind at the helm of the fourth iteration of *Street Fighter* – we cornered him to get his thoughts on this evolution of the franchise.

OPS: So many aspects of the *Street Fighter* franchise have been revamped and reworked for *SFIV*, but the most apparent change is in terms of the art design – what was the reasoning behind this striking new look?

YOSHINORI ONO: Well, the concept behind the art style of this title was to take the character sketches and paintings that had been produced for other games in the series over the years, and have very much become associated with the *Street Fighter* franchise, and develop a system of shaders to accurately reproduce that feel through moving characters on the video monitor. The reasoning behind this is that

since we've arrived at the series' 20th anniversary, it would make sense to give the overall look and feel of the game a sort of familiarity to longtime fans.

I don't propose that we've done something brand new or particularly groundbreaking to the visuals when you look at the game as a part of the *SF* series. I see it as a natural and organic evolution of the visual style and aesthetic already established by all the great artists that have poured their hearts and souls into the series until now. In other words, this isn't a 'new look' for *Street Fighter*, but a natural outgrowth for the series.

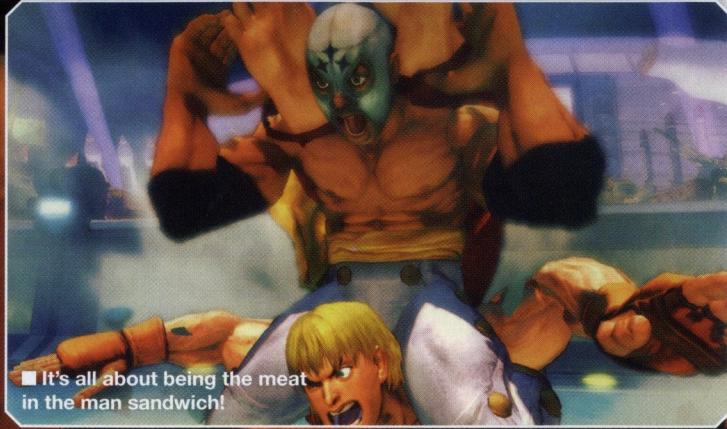
OPS: In many ways *Street Fighter IV* is more like *SFII* than any other game in the series – was this a conscious decision? Do you feel that other games in the franchise moved away from the original formula too much?

ONO: Well, I can start off by saying that I don't feel that other games in the franchise had in any way strayed far from the original formula. I do, however, ▶





■ "Get in my belly!"



■ "It's all about being the meat in the man sandwich!"

think that the *Street Fighter* series is comprised of games geared toward certain classes or levels of players. Each title or offshoot in the series has been very much aimed at and tuned for players of a given ability level. The most notable example of this would be the venerable *SFIII* series.

Because *III* was released after both *II* and *Alpha*, the market was populated with a very talented set of players who had honed their skills on those titles that had come before. As a result, *III* was very much aimed toward the proclivities of these hardcore players. It is a game with tremendous depth, most of which can only truly be tapped by very skilled players.

This time around, we've made a very conscious and very deliberate effort to adopt the same rules, the same sort of 'feel' on display in *II* and update it to become a new fighting 'tool' for the modern age. That was this project's driving concept from the start.

That's why I'm thrilled that you even asked this question. It shows that our efforts have paid off and that you recognise the connection we're attempting to establish.

If we take a moment to consider fighting games as 'tools' rather than games, we can say that the *SFII* series was the sort of fighting tool that was enjoyed by a simply staggering number of players. None of us of a certain age need to consult the manual to know how to play. The 'rulebook' is simply embedded into our brains at this point. The inherent familiarity of this system is terribly

important. The same goes for sports or any other kind of game. The shorter the barrier of entry, the easier it is for a player to grasp the rules, the more likely you are to draw a large number of people in. This is especially important for games with a one-on-one aspect. Both players should have a basic familiarity with how to play the game if we really want a fair fight.

OPS: Besides *Street Fighter IV*, which SF game is your personal favourite and why?

ONO: I would have to go with *SFII Champion Edition*. It's simply the easiest for me to pick up and play and the level of challenge is tuned just right. And you could actually play as the Shadaloo bosses! That was such a big deal back then. I mean, there were plenty of people who couldn't even take those bosses down in *II*, so the ability to control them was nothing short of mind-blowing. Not only that, the overall game balance was tweaked really well for one on one play.

The best part was that the move input timing had been adjusted, resulting in even smoother play. It became easier to get characters to do exactly what you wanted them to do.

When *Turbo* came out, the high speed made it really difficult to read or anticipate your opponent's next moves. I felt kind of bummed that I could no longer enjoy that aspect of the game.

That's why I prefer *Champion Edition* over *Turbo*. Not only is it a nostalgic experience, but it's one heck of a game!



EL FUERTE

El Fuerte is a Mexican luchadore, with a penchant for gourmet cooking. Bears a slight resemblance to Rey Mysterio!

CRIMSON VIPER

Crimson Viper adds to the female quotient of SFIV, and is the only character in the roster to have a double jump.

ABEL

Hailing from France, Abel just so happens to have amnesia! Just like a whole bunch of other Street Fighter characters then...

OPS: It seems like SFIV is a delicate attempt to refresh the franchise, whilst still retaining that distinct Street Fighter feel. Is it difficult to keep that balance, and what steps have you taken to make sure that SFIV remains familiar?

ONO: The driving theme behind the development of this game has been the desire to deliver to fans a game that successfully preserves the feel of II.

We all have fond memories of those days and they stick with us even today. It's thanks to the fans and their fondness for the series we've been able to make it this far! We've had a long time for these memories of II to burn their way into our hearts and minds, and we have made it our goal throughout development to not betray those memories and to preserve that kernel of II in the core gameplay. I think we've accomplished that.

There was really no active movement toward a deliberate differentiation between this title and other entries in the series. No matter which SF game we're talking about, there is always a certain SF essence within. I knew that by respecting this essence and nourishing it, we would naturally end up with a game that offers yet another take on the series while not betraying what makes these games special.

OPS: In many ways the fighting genre has become a bit stagnant, with very little innovation in terms of gameplay in the last five years. 3D fighters such as Soulcalibur 4, Virtua

Fighter 5, DOA4 have all come and gone with very little change from their predecessors. Do you think there is a problem with fighting games as a whole, and do you think SFIV could possibly kickstart the genre creatively?

ONO: I really think of fighting games less as being games in the traditional sense and more as being what you might want to call a 'digital fighting tool'. All it really provides are the rules and a stage for you to fight within.

a mastery of the rules. I've said it before and I'll say it again: We aren't attempting to reinvent the fighting game wheel with SFIV. We set out to take the established rule set we are all accustomed to and build upon it, tuning it appropriately to fit today's landscape. If and when we truly go for a full on reinvention of the proverbial wheel, it will probably be through a brand new title and not a sequel like this.

by players with a variety of skill levels.

When we talk about skill levels, let's take chess for example. There are televised championships between Russian and American star players. These players have spent a great deal of time reading the rulebook very deeply and achieving an incredible level of understanding of the rules contained therein.

Conversely, we have the idyllic image of a Grandfather playing chess on a Sunday afternoon on a folding table in the backyard. Now, these guys aren't going for any spectacular techniques. They're not looking to exploit their esoteric knowledge of the rules. They're just relaxing and playing for fun. But – and here's the important part – they're both playing the same game, right?

So we knew right away that if we were to add some new rules to this title, we would have to ensure that everyone from world class champions to casual Grandfather/Grandson Sunday players would be able to access and take advantage of them. And that's the basis of the new Focus Attack system.

The controls are simple. All you do is press mid punch and mid kick at the same time, but, by stringing together this simple input with other techniques, the available depth really begins to show itself.

It's important to note that you can also cancel out of this manoeuvre and segue into another move to get really tricky. This technique can be utilised by just about anyone with ease. It has a very low barrier of entry.

"The driving theme behind the development of this game has been the desire to deliver to fans a game that successfully preserves the feel of II..."

It's only natural for games within a series to maintain a high degree of consistency. I mean, how many times have the rules to chess changed throughout history? I honestly can't say that implementing sweeping changes to the basic rules of a fighting game is a praiseworthy endeavour. To be sure, some players will be disappointed that the rules this time around are similar to what they've already played. I'm willing to take my lumps for that, but I must insist that what really brings out the depth of any fighting game and makes them truly fun is

OPS: A big addition to SFIV comes in the form of the saving system, or focus attacks, which come at the expense of the popular parry system from SFIII. Could you tell us how the focus attacks work, and why this feature has been added to the game?

ONO: As I've said, the bible we were working from for IV is the established rulebook of II. The last thing we wanted to do was add a gigantic appendix to this book. We also knew that anything we were to add to this system would have to have a wide appeal and be useable

"We tried our best to preserve the sort of weirdness that all SF characters need to have..."

OPS: Speaking of multiplayer – what is the online strategy for *Street Fighter IV*? Most fighters have struggled to create a system that works well online – how do you go about creating fun-filled, lag-free online experience in the fighting genre?

ONO: Let's be frank. Unless someone figures out a way to fit a set of jet engines onto the system of tubes we call the internet, there is no feasible way to completely eliminate lag.

That said, we aren't just going to lie down and roll over for this monster we call lag. Steps are being taken. We've carefully examined the infrastructure around the world and figured out ways to reduce the impact of lag. There are ways to minimise its impact to be sure, whether it be through adjustments in the user interface, graphic presentation, or something else entirely. We aren't completely powerless in the face of lag and we're taking necessary steps to combat its ill effects.

Sadly, there will always be those among us with less than speedy internet connections. And there are those of us with fast but unstable connections. These people want to play *Street Fighter* too, right? Our goal is to make their experience, everyone's experience, as free from stress and irritation as possible. That's why Capcom is putting its all into finding ways, many of which are methods of lessening lag's input through clever adjustments to the UI and graphical tweaks, to make certain that all players can have an enjoyable online experience with *SFIV*.

To be sure, there are some very good technological innovations out there that help to eliminate lag, including predictive input algorithms or rewind functionality that restores previous system states. The only problem with these technologies is that they have a bit of an appetite when it comes to CPU power. Until this tech progresses a bit further, it will remain impractical to implement it into a game of such a calibre as *Street Fighter IV*.

OPS: It has been stated that all the characters from *Street Fighter II* will return – is this linked to Capcom's attempt to make *Street Fighter IV* familiar to fans of *SFII*? And could you tell us about some of the newer characters in the game?

ONO: This isn't so much the result of some effort to establish a link between *II* and *IV* as it is the natural result of basing the rule set on what we saw in *II*. When we decided to adopt that rulebook as a base, it seemed only natural to bring along the original 12 characters from that title as well.

Of course, because this is *IV* and not just a remake or new version of *II*, we made all manner of adjustments to that rulebook to modernise things a bit. We also added four brand new characters that really take advantage of the rules we have established.

When it comes down to it, the only

reason we were even able to get this title made is because fan demand was so great. I personally witnessed the level at which fans are rabid for this series during my press junkets for other titles in North America and Europe. I mean, I'd be there to talk about *Onimusha*, but people would raise their hands and ask questions like, "So, when are you going to make a new *Street Fighter*?" This didn't happen just once, either.

Until now, R&D has taken charge of the direction of all SF characters, but we decided to try something different this time. Since so many of the fan requests came from outside Japan, we thought it only appropriate to give our other branches some input into the new characters. Their research and advice helped to shape the four newcomers.

We tried our best to preserve the sort of weirdness that all SF characters need to have while also thinking hard about *IV* and its look and feel when coming up with them. I think they turned out really well.

OPS: *Street Fighter IV* was originally a game that Capcom were hesitant to green light. Now that the game is near release, how much pressure is there to live up to the expectations of not only the fans, but Capcom themselves? Do you expect the game to find the audience it requires to be successful?

ONO: Now that we're on the home stretch, I can almost feel the anticipation of the players. It's like electricity. So, the pressure from the fan side has died down a lot. That said, the internal pressure hasn't let up. Capcom is known for quality, so the internal hurdles are high. We've been in development for a long time, and there's still a bit of a stretch to go to bring this title home. Geez... I sure hope management doesn't pull the plug on us at the last minute! (laughs)

Anyway, from the expressions on the faces of people playing the game, I can rest easy knowing that we're going to deliver

– fans will get exactly what they've been hoping for. ▶





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PG

Mild violence

PSP
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TALKIN' BOUT MY GEN-ER-ATION

WORDS: DAVID KOZICKI

Last-gen, next-gen, this gen... all terms loosely tossed about, giving us a rough indication of where games fit into the scheme of things. Yet, 'next-gen' is thrown around with merry abandon – but have we actually reached the next plateau? Is what we're playing now *truly* next-gen?



Gext-gen. It's one of those cool, hipster buzz words used to generate excitement and hype up the community about a certain product. We're sure you all remember those dark days before the PS3.

Like a prodigal son returning home, the inception of the PS3 was looked at as almost the second coming of you know who. Bigger, louder, stronger, it could bench press 250 pounds, was 35 times more powerful than that pissant PS2. It could be utilised as a multimedia centre, turn water into wine, coal into gold and would eventually die for our sins until resurrected as the PS4. Bold claims

indeed. And while we have no doubts as to the strength or performance of the hardware, one question kept niggling in the back of our minds. It was simple – have we reached next-gen?

Sure, we have the technology, but if we use the lifespan of the PS2 as our control subject, it wasn't until the near twilight of its journey that the true capabilities were discovered, with titles such as *Final Fantasy XII*, *GTA San Andreas* and *God of War II*. The technology was there, but not the 'know how'. On the flipside of the coin, we're still in infant stages of the PS3, and to be quite frank with you, we don't think we're

at next-gen just yet (pause for dramatic effect). Perhaps some games get close, or nut out a few ideas in the right direction, but think about it, when was the last time you were genuinely gobsmacked by a game? Not impressed, not intrigued, but absolutely blown away by something you'd never seen before. We can't speak for the rest of you, but it's been a while for us and we'll break down just why...

FRESH COAT OF PAINT

To many, next-gen doesn't amount to much more than a higher resolution coat of paint on exactly the same product, and we

don't know about you guys, but that simply don't cut the mustard. A little cosmetic surgery isn't going to take us over to the next level. Now don't get us wrong, it's definitely a necessary step in the right direction, but it's not the only step.

The way we look at it, next-gen must achieve everything that the best of the best did on last generation consoles, use that as a starting point, and build on it. We're not trying to be harsh or unfair, but it's not like this is the first year of gaming now. We have a rich history of what's been tried and tested and what works. By now developers should have no excuse for not creating a top



notch product incorporating the best aspects of all those that came before it, and then surge ahead. It's one of the most frustrating parts of what we do, constantly seeing titles that almost get there, or have a few cool concepts amongst a veritable sea of crap. You just want to shake people screaming "you've been at this for years, why can't you just get the shit right?!" We get even more annoyed when we see a PS3 release that looks like it could have easily been

produced for the PS2. These get used as coasters for our coffee, and barely deserve that honour.

DON'T HATE THE PLAYA

Where we have made impressive inroads is with regards to AI and how decidedly

human it's becoming (no *Terminator* jokes, we promise). Two cases in point, *Uncharted* and *MotorStorm*, both, funny enough, early releases. Let's take away the OMFG graphics factor and just look at them both. *Uncharted* has some seriously tough AI to skirt around.

Now we're not talking *Ninja Gaiden* 'hard for the sake of making you smash your controller' hard, but genuinely resourceful and almost communicating with each other enemies. You'd be pinned down in a fire-fight to notice guys

SIXAXIS? MORE LIKE TWO-AXIS

We won't dwell on this too long (we don't have the space here anyway), but we have to mention something regarding the SIXAXIS. This much-touted addition robbed us for a while of our rumble feature and was barely even used; with the exception of *LAIR* (we will never speak its name again) other than a balancing add on for adventure games. You can use it for motion control, but seriously who would? We'd really like to see some imagination go into this underused piece of hardware.

LEADERS OF THE NEW SCHOOL

Here's a few titles we feel are at least trying a little something different.

MIRROR'S EDGE

The concept alone is worth the price of admission. Parkour style antics in a First Person Non-Shooter? We love it. We love the simple control scheme too. Take it back to basics and immerse yourselves.



FALLOUT 3

A mix of turn based RPG elements, First Person view point and a chance to explore a vast open world with you deciding if you're good or evil and letting you play it out as you see fit? Definitely moving in the right direction.



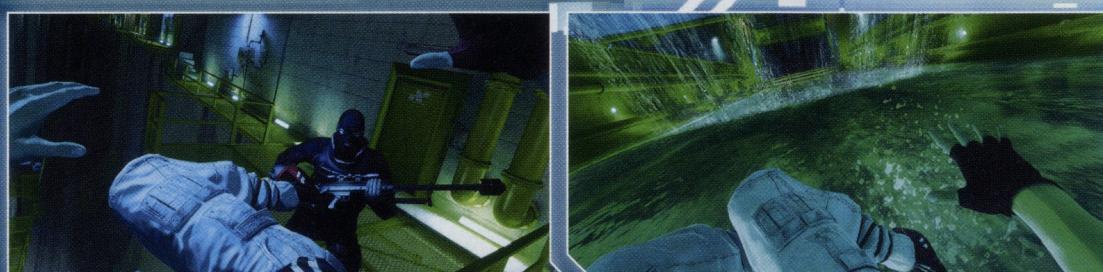
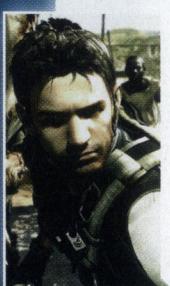
PRINCE OF PERSIA

It takes balls to move a franchise to a bold new place, but that's just what they're doing. With one on one mini boss battles, beautiful cel-shaded graphics and a unique buddy system, this is one to keep your eyes on.



RESIDENT EVIL 5

It looks so good we want to do naughty stuff with it. The true vision of next-gen graphics has finally arrived but will the old-school gameplay be able to back it up? Of course it will, are you crazy?



lobbing grenades to draw you out of cover, or outflanking you and taking pot-shots at your exposed position. It was tough, frustrating but oh so refreshing to have the enemy intelligently overrun your position. It made you rethink your tactics, and really put you in a corner.

MotorStorm was a different, muddier kettle of fish. We're sure you've experienced this scenario before. You've managed to somehow stay in the lead for the last lap of the race, the finish line is in sight, just one more corner to go and some piece of shit, rhymes with runt, AI controlled driver nudges your back wheels and pushes you off the track, slipping from first to sixth in the space

of a heartbeat. As irritation takes hold and you start foaming at the mouth, you realise you've just been punked by the game. Not a mate or another guy online, but a program. We can't speak for you guys, but that made us smile. Nothing comes close to the online experience against real live adversaries, but it sure as hell came close.

YOU HAD ME AT HELLO... TEAR

The new frontier that needs to be explored is emotional content. How in tune with the characters you feel, the emotional investment you have in the storyline. That feeling you get where

you know you're playing a videogame, and you know it's not real, but it affects you none the less. We're talking, *FFVII* when Sephiroth killed you know who, involvement here. That was on the PSOne for Christ's sake and we still get misty thinking about it. Take us on a journey. We'll happily ride the emotional roller-coaster with you, just make it interesting and engaging.

We're not trying to be overly harsh, or critical, but we want to play next-gen, not just get close to it. We want that feeling of joy we've experienced only a few times. Remember the first time you played *Metal Gear Solid* and had to switch controllers to defeat Psycho Mantis, or the when you

strode down the mean streets of Liberty City to see it fully gloriously rendered (at the time)? Good times.

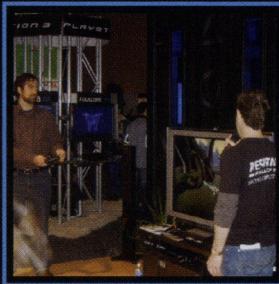
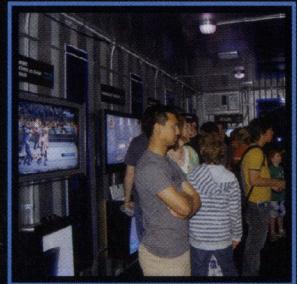
We want those moments back, more of them and more often. We've had a few get close, like the sheer scale of *Oblivion*, or the exceptionally well-balanced *Metal Gear Solid 4*, but it isn't enough. We want to walk around month to month with our jaws dropped to the ground wondering where the hell can we go from here, and genuinely not have the answer. Mix it up a little and take a chance. Don't just tweak a menu, go balls to the wall, gives us some unique new gameplay; you'll be surprised with what you can accomplish. It's not too much to ask for now is it? ♦

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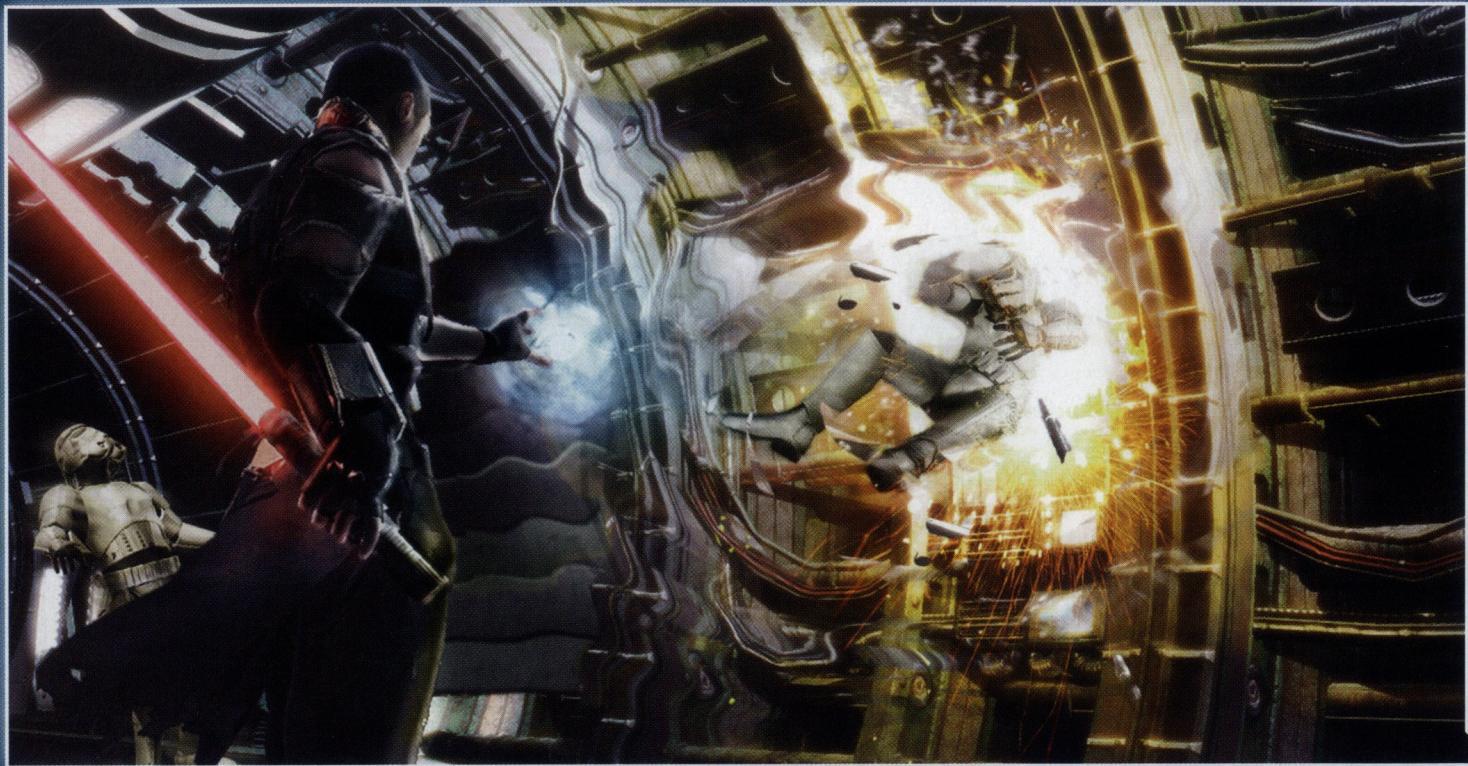
PLAYSTATION 3



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We had a quick chat with Creative Director/Co-Founder of Aussie developer Krome

Studios, Steve Stamatidis, about 'next-gen' and the future of videogames.

OPS: BIAS ASIDE, DO YOU THINK THAT WE'VE REALLY REACHED NEXT-GEN?

STEVE STAMATIDIIS: It depends on your definition of next gen. I'd have said we reached next gen when the current batch of hardware hit the market I actually prefer the term HD gen because that's what's really been pushed as next-gen to the public. It really seems to be all about high definition visuals, multiplayer internet connectivity and a more accessible experience.

Have we hit the real promise of next-gen and what it can be? No, not by a long shot, those targets have just opened up a whole new world of possibilities of what next-gen games can really give us.

OPS: HOW EXACTLY DO YOU THINK YOUR TITLES ARE NEXT-GEN?

STAMATIDIIS: It's funny but I actually half joke that *Star Wars: The Force*

Unleashed on PS2 is the first next gen PS2 title. It features a lot of what we put into titles for proper next gen hardware. It has AI that lets NPC actually fight each other to help or hinder you, a powerful physics simulation system, accessible gameplay and great graphics. If we could push the PS2 any harder it would evolve into a PS3. Of course *Hellboy: Science of Evil* is doing the same, but on PS3 and we're only just starting to really get to know the hardware. Expect to see us really start to push next gen hardware in our next batch of titles.

OPS: WHAT NEW DIRECTIONS SHOULD AI BE GOING INTO?

STAMATIDIIS: I definitely think AI should move away from trying to be too smart and punishing the player. We should be pushing AI to create a more enjoyable experience for the player and that's not always about making enemies follow you around the level better. AI needs to react to your actions and create a believable world and it needs to do that on screen.

OPS: DO YOU FEEL THE SIXAXIS HAS BEEN PROPERLY UTILISED?

STAMATIDIIS: No – I think it has a lot more potential than has currently been

used. We're just scratching the surface with what we can do with motion sensing, but it requires thinking about game control in a whole different way. Unfortunately, there really isn't that much scope to try that sort of thing out when you're doing a big mass market game. That's why it usually feels really gimmicky or worse yet, forced upon the player.

OPS: HOW IMPORTANT ARE VISUALS TO THE NEXT GEN EXPERIENCE?

STAMATIDIIS: Visuals have always been important to games and I think they're always going to be a focal point to any game experience. They're the BIG discernable difference between this and previous gens.

OPS: HOW IMPORTANT DO YOU THINK HIGH DEFINITION VISUALS HAVE BEEN THIS GENERATION?

STAMATIDIIS: It's easy to underestimate the allure of crisp HD visuals with plenty of shader effects until you really experience it on the big screen. Really, HD visuals are pretty much what have sold this generation of machines.

OPS: HOW MUCH OF THE CELL-PROCESSOR ARE YOU USING, WE HEAR MOST ARE ONLY USING AROUND 50%?

STAMATIDIIS: I'd say that's about right. Though getting the next 50% out of the cell is the REALLY hard part!

OPS: WHAT ARE THE DIFFICULTIES IN DEVELOPING CODE FOR THE PS3?

STAMATIDIIS: The PS3, like its predecessors, is its own special beast. The difficulty comes from having to make games work multiplatform and not being able to really push the machine as much as we'd like. Having said that it's important to know that we consider the PS3 our lead format and have a really talented team of people working on our engine technology.

OPS: IS THE FUTURE OF GAMING RESIDING IN THE EMOTIONAL CONTENT AND INVESTMENT?

STAMATIDIIS: Future? No, I think gaming has always required that sort of content and investment. That's what turns a simulation or a toy into a great game. A flight sim is one thing, but add a rival pilot who's out to gun you down and you have an intense dogfight. That's where the real magic is at.



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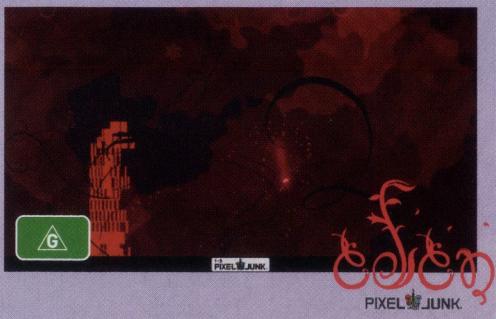
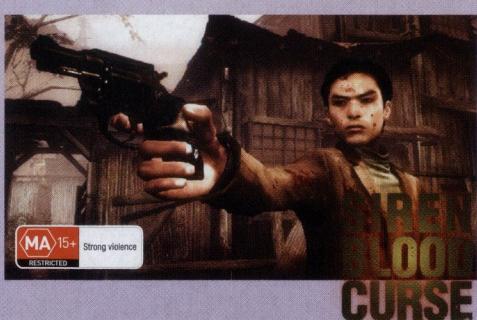
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PLAYSTATION 3

ONLINE

The latest PSN news, online reviews, reader online sections and more!

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Soulcalibur IV

Still deciding whether or not to pick up this game? Well, create a Japanese account for yourself and download this – if you're lucky it might be available on the Aussie store by the time you read this.



Heavy Rain

This game looks absolutely phenomenal – and now you can check it out with your own eyes. While some elements of this demo devolve into quicktime button mashing, we're impressed with this new approach to gaming.



Kratos

In-between severing throats, raping maidens, and de-limbing his enemies, Kratos chills out with a game of golf. Download the new pack for *Everybody's Golf* if you don't believe us.



The Force Unleashed

Star Wars fans will soil themselves – the rest of us mere mortals? Not quite so sure. This demo is the best way to find out if this game is your cup of tea – download away people.



Pure

We've been singing the praises of this title, now it's your chance to check it out for yourself. In our opinion this demo is an absolute must for those with even a smattering of interest in racers or extreme sports titles.



Leipzig Stuff

If you head onto the store you'll find a whole heap of trailers, interviews, and even the entire Sony press conference. Sony had a very strong showing in Germany, with new trailers for all their top upcoming games. Check them out.



RATCHET & CLANK FUTURE: QUEST FOR BOOTY

What's cooler than pirates, ghosts and robots? PIRATE GHOST ROBOTS!

Okey, so the last *R&C* game ended on a cliffhanger with your BFF Clank being taken by the mysterious, but cute, Zoni. So this downloadable content would surely explain the ending of *Tools of Destruction* and prepare us for the next big *R&C*, right?

Wrong, unfortunately! Now don't get us wrong, *Booty* is a fine game. It's a lean, slick, beautifully constructed adventure where you'll acquire weapons, old and new, get some funky abilities and fight off giant crabs, cave-dwelling monsters and pirate ghost robots. Or robotic pirate ghosts. Your call.

Regardless, there is action aplenty, some funny dialogue and an absolutely stunning sequence where Ratchet leaps from ship-to-ship to fight his nemesis (who we won't reveal here) and then, um... it ends.

There is at best maybe just over four hours

of gameplay here. Six if you're one of those obsessive types who need to collect every nut, bolt, weapon and upgrade.

At around \$25 that would seem quite reasonable, but the problem is – you're just starting to build a head of steam and it's all over!

Yes, the puzzles are inventive and there are some sequences that even top *ToD*, the ending gives you a little more info but still manages to be cliffhanging (it's a word – maybe).

Quest for Booty is a fine game, consistently enjoyable and charming. However, something feels like it's missing: mainly Clank and another 20 hours of play. Now if this was a chapter in an ongoing *R&C* adventure (split up like, say, *SIREN: Blood Curse*) that would be quite spectacular. As it is, it just manages to be pretty good.

★★★





SIREN: BLOOD CURSE

This hill ain't silent!

Slipping quietly under the radar, *SIREN: Blood Curse* is an absolute treat for horror fans.

Quick synopsis: a group of journalists and some other randoms are on a remote island where they witness a human sacrifice.

Terrified, the characters run blindly into the dark woods - trying to escape. But there is no escape. And once the siren starts up, wailing like an anguished banshee, you'll soon know the feeling of cold, dead fingers clawing at your throat and decayed teeth chewing your flesh.

SIREN: Blood Curse is scary. Seriously scary. The Shitido (sorta like the offspring of zombies and demons) come in brainless, shambling human form, capable of speech and hunting you down

and, well, there are other forms - most of which you'll want to avoid.

There is something really primal about exploring this surreal island. Improvised weapons are your main protection and the torchlight turns every tree into a beast ready to pounce.

The game is genuinely gripping. You can purchase the game in packs of three episodes a piece, but honestly, for less than fifty bucks it's well worth getting the lot.

SIREN: Blood Curse is the best Survival Horror title we've seen in a long while. Atmospheric and tense, it really delivers the spooky genre goodies.

★★★



BIONIC COMMANDO REARMED

Destined to be loved... and hated

Australians are in a weird position when it comes to the *Bionic Commando* franchise. Since the NES never took off here in the same way it did in the States, most of us don't look back on the original as some pristine, rose-tinted example of game design. In fact most of us don't look back on it at all!

But even if you've never heard of the franchise you'd be silly to miss out on *Bionic Commando Rearmed*, a title that has an insane 90° learning curve, but is as rewarding as they come.

Because when you first boot up *Bionic Commando Rearmed*, your brain will be assaulted with a barrage of 'whys'. Why can't I shoot in different directions? Why can't I jump? Why can't

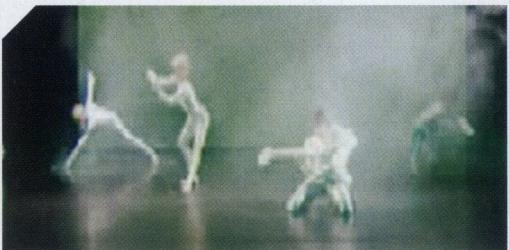
I climb over that tiny barrel? A couple of hours in, however, every one of those choices will be justified in full, as you come to realise just how deftly this game becomes insanely compulsive.

Rearmed is a remake in every sense of the word. Not only are the game's mechanics faithfully replicated, the 'ye olde' 8-bit, nipple chewing, difficulty level remains. For some this will be a deal breaker but, personally, we loved the challenge.

Developers please take note: this is how classics should be remade. Faithfully, with the base mechanics left intact, and the junk left by the wayside.

★★★

LOLGASM



SO YOU THINK YOU CAN DANCE?

To be perfectly honest we don't know why we're recommending that you watch this. In fact, on reflection, you really probably shouldn't. One of the 'weird-lights' from the Games Convention in Leipzig was this interpretative dance. Which tells you how disappointing that show really was. Those crazy Europeans...

Watch it at: <http://gamevideos.1up.com/video/id/20986>

Or Google: Leipzig interpretative dance



RED RINGIN'

Well, you know, it's not really nice to gloat, especially when the PS3 is so reliable, but still - this ode to the red ring problems of the 360 is mildly amusing, and worth watching to remember one of the major reasons why you probably picked up a PS3 in the first place.

Watch it at: www.gametrailers.com/player/usermovies/249741.html

Or Google: Three red rings song



THREE PS3s

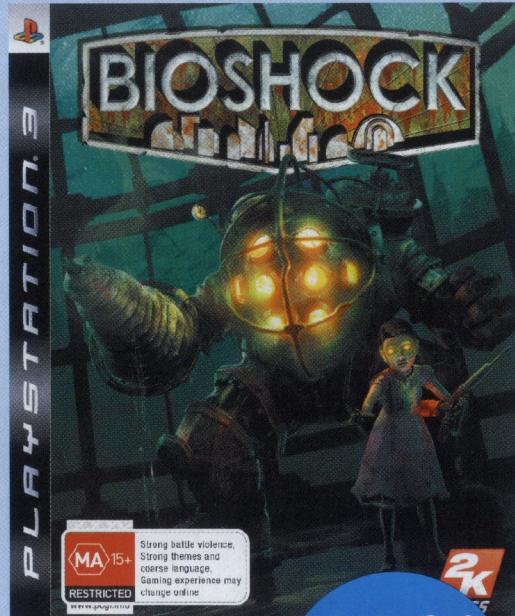
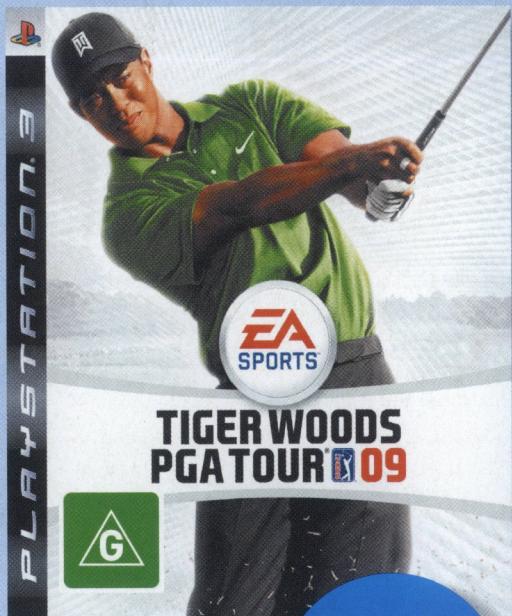
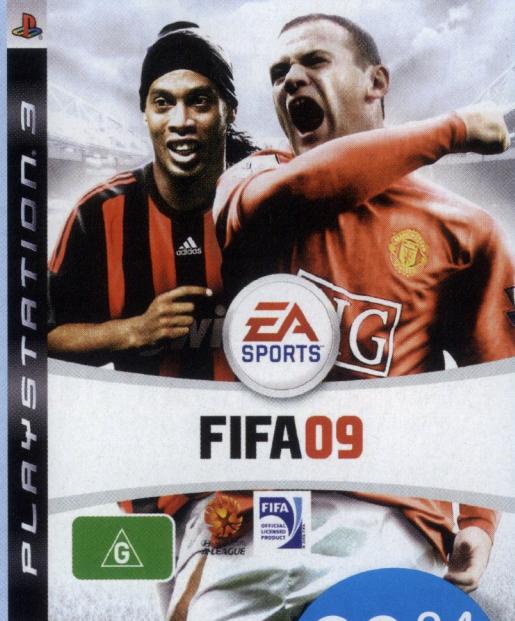
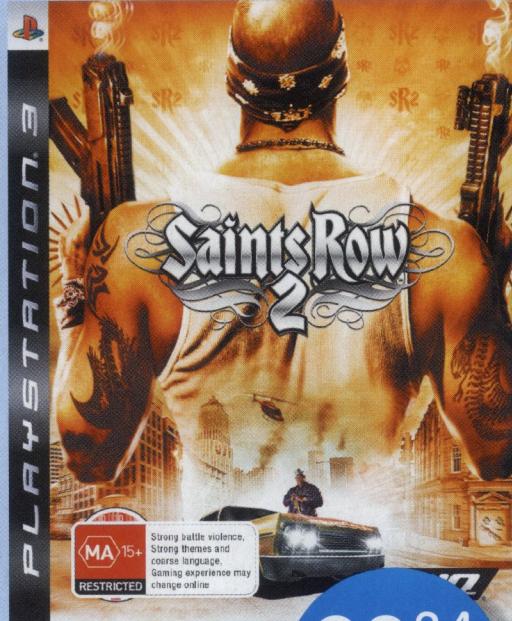
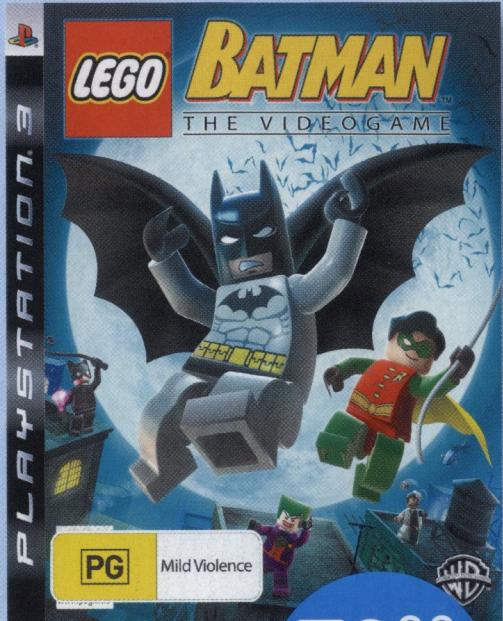
Struggling to save the cashola to pick up a PlayStation 3? Then you are going to love this guy - and by 'love' we mean 'hate with a burning fury that could melt lead'. Honestly, though, this is quite funny - especially if you love watching dudes tweak their own nipples - oh, wait...

Watch it at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uh1jB4hVJRg&feature=related>

Or Google: Three PS3s

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THIS MONTH'S RELEASES PUT TO THE TEST

REVIEWS

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REVIEW RATINGS

01

Reserved for the very worst that developers have to offer.

Essentially, anything that receives this score has no redeeming qualities whatsoever. A game receiving this score could not possibly be any worse, unless it was broken from the outset (or gave you cancer, or killed your dog). A game that should never have even survived its first pitch – as bad as it gets.

02

A terrible, terrible game. There may be one or two things about this game that work, or aren't actually broken, but they are so hopelessly outnumbered by the sheer quantity of badness that they basically cease to exist. Maybe it has a clever name, maybe the concept was sound – but virtually every single thing about it is bad beyond belief. Not worth the effort.

03

Very disappointing. A game with this score is fundamentally flawed in a number of extremely vital ways. There may be one or two things that could've been done somewhat worse than they have been, but for most part it's totally uninspired, boring and unappealing in every way. There are games that are worse, but there's not that many.

04

Poor. There may be parts of this game that are vaguely fun, and it may be robust enough in a few departments, but the overall package is lacking any significant reason to stick it out. Games receiving this score may show initial promise, or sound good at first, but will be unrefined, undercooked and let down by shoddy execution and poor attention to detail.

05

Mediocre. In the strictest terms, 50% is a pass – just. Unfortunately, a game receiving this score will have had just as many things go wrong with it as go right, and that really isn't enough to succeed. A game receiving this score will probably be entertaining in parts without excelling anywhere, yet equally sub-par in others without being outright awful.

06

Decent enough, although still lacking a certain something. A game receiving this score will be sound, but will have some fairly glaring faults and your interest will probably wane pretty quickly. It will have a number of limitations that will probably turn off more than a few gamers, but will get just enough right to keep dedicated fans of the genre ploughing through.

07

Good. A robust, fun game that's well worth a look, although will only rarely amaze. A game receiving this score will have more or less accomplished nearly all it set out to do in a decent fashion, but it will have some noticeable problems that prevent it from being as good as it could be. Nevertheless, they generally won't ruin the overall gaming experience.

08

Great. A game receiving this score comes highly recommended. A combination of some odd issues, minor problems or a lack of innovation may hamper it somewhat, but the overall impression it leaves it very positive. Very entertaining, very satisfying and you wouldn't hesitate to recommend it to others. Well ahead of the pack in most departments.

09

Excellent. Outstanding in almost every way. Some negligible blemishes will just keep it from being held aloft as a true masterpiece, but it is very likely the best in its field. Most elements of this game will be truly remarkable and you'll be hard-pressed to find too many other games of greater quality. An astonishing game that leaves all but the very best behind.

10

Incredible. Everything went right during the creation of this game. A game receiving a perfect 10 does not necessarily mean it is perfect, likely just teasingly close, but to reserve 10s for THE perfect game is pointless. Instead, a 10 represents a game of gobsmacking brilliance, a game that stands high above the rest and a game that you cannot afford to ignore. A masterpiece.

THE OPS AWARDS



The Gold Award

is a rare gem and only to be given to games that score that magic 10/10. This score indicates gaming of simply incredible quality!



The Silver Award

is for games that receive 9/10. If you see this, it's a sign of star quality, indicating that you should buy this game now!



The Bronze Award

is for games that score 8/10. These games are highly recommended and are 100% guaranteed to satisfy.

OPS REVIEW SETUP



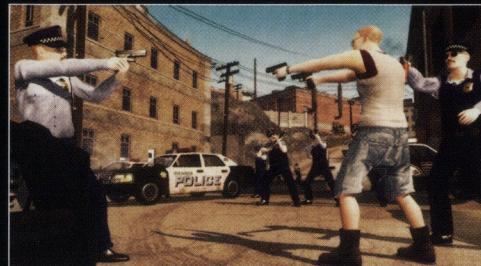
We choose to review our games on a super-slick Full HD 1080p 40" Bravia X-series for the best picture possible. This sucker melts eyeballs...

INSIDE...



BIOSHOCK

Does it shock in a good way... or a bad way? – page 64



SAINTS ROW 2

Bringing fun back to the sandbox genre – page 68



BROTHERS IN ARMS: HELL'S HIGHWAY

War is hell – but it is a fun hell? – page 72

PS3 PS2 PSP REVIEW

■ GENRE: SHOOTER
■ RELEASE: OCTOBER 2008
■ DEVELOPER: 2K
■ DISTRIBUTOR: 2K

■ PLAYERS: 1-16
■ PRICE: \$109.95
■ HD: 720p
■ WEB: www.2kgames.com

■ BACK STORY: *BioShock* was one of major contenders for game of the year in 2007, and now PS3 owners get the chance to partake in one of the most believable game worlds ever created. Is it too little to late for Ken Levine's masterpiece?

■ Where have you been young girl? You were supposed to be home three hours ago! I'm so mad! See! I go all yellow when I'm mad!

BIOSHOCK

Big Daddy's back, bitches

BioShock starts in an aeroplane, en route to an unknown destination. Some words are uttered; your plane hurtles towards the sea in a jet of flames, and you're left stranded, curtailed by a valley of flames, in the middle of a vast, faceless ocean.

At this point it may look and feel like you're in the throes of your bog standard cut scene, gripping your controller, waiting to start the game in earnest, but you're not. You are already in control, and will be, without interruption, for the rest of the experience, free to make choices that may disturb and possibly haunt you for weeks afterwards.

Ultimately, *BioShock* is all about control, about choice (or lack there-

of), and the illusion of free will – raising a whole subtext of thematic layers that few games on the market even broach – all neatly wrapped up in one of the most staggeringly immersive environments ever created.

OLD TIMER

But, let's be honest here, *BioShock* is old. It first hit the 360 over a year ago, and after the initial furore that came from having a game that (gasp) actually had something substantial to say, when the

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**BRONZE
AWARD**
8/10



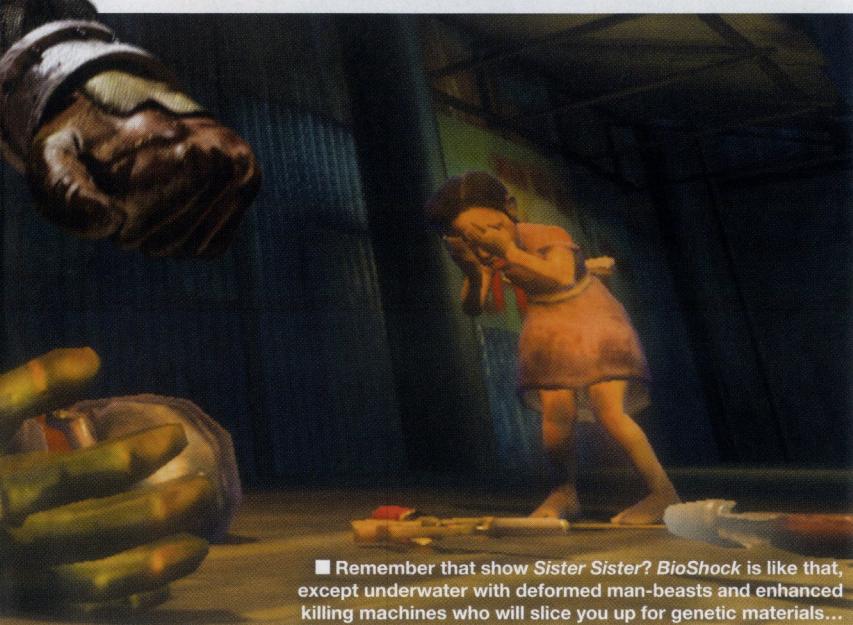
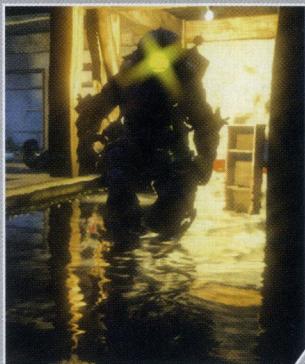
■ Big Daddies – toilet trips are way frustrating for these guys...



"the Plasmids are the real star of the show here – progressing through the game you can add or remove different abilities, essentially shaping the way you progress through the game..."

WHO'S YOUR DADDY?

You've likely heard about the Big Daddy/Little Sister relationship, but it's probably worth talking about since it really is one of the defining aspects of the game. The ponderous Big Daddies in *BioShock* are initially completely harmless, and won't attack you unless you attack first, or go anywhere near the Little Sisters that follow them around. But, oh my, when a Big Daddy does attack you he won't hold back. These things move at an insane pace, and pack Tyson-esque punches. Taking them down is one of most rewarding challenges *BioShock* has to offer.



■ Remember that show *Sister Sister*? *BioShock* is like that, except underwater with deformed man-beasts and enhanced killing machines who will slice you up for genetic materials...

dust and hype settled almost everyone involved agreed that *BioShock* wasn't exactly the perfect experience everyone initially thought it to be.

What was wrong with it? Well nothing much to be honest... small things, twitchy shooting mechanics, an initial promise of choice that falls flat – mostly the typical backlash towards a game universally praised by critics.

So now, with the hype, and subsequent backlash, receding back from whence it came, maybe *BioShock* can get a fair, honest shake of the dice.

UNDERWATER SLAUGHTER

To begin with, if you haven't had the pleasure of playing *BioShock* previously, then you should make it your mission to pick up a copy. *BioShock* is arguably one of the defining moments of this generation so far, and a ball hair away from being an absolute masterpiece.

The environment, Rapture itself, is the real star of the show here, and is

so vividly portrayed that it plays like a well-defined character throughout. The idealised, post-war vision of the future, that Rapture represents elicits a genuinely chilling irony, as its determination to march blindly towards progress is sharply contrasted with the disastrous monstrosity it has become.

And not just visually, but the sound – the droning '50s orchestra, the hissing claustrophobia of the information tapes strewn across the flooded wreckage – absolutely everything in the environment succeeds in drawing you into arguably the most compelling world in videogaming.

Rapture is a mess that not even you, the hero, can clean up.

ENRAPTURED

The first three to four hours of *BioShock* are completely compelling, and feature some of the most enthralling set pieces outside of *Call of Duty 4*. Like the aforementioned *COD4*, *BioShock* spins its incredible yarn minus Metal

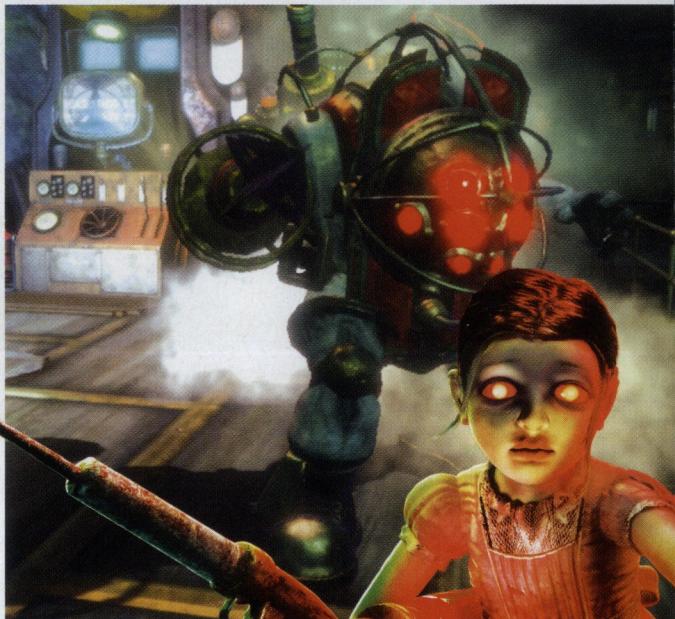
■ Waah... you won't take me alive, copper!



INFO BYTE

BioShock was actually part developed in Australia, by 2K Australia. It's enough to make you all patriotic and fuzzy inside.

■ A little some for my fishman homies...



"BioShock spins its incredible yarn minus *Metal Gear*-esque cutscenes, and without the clunky exposition of *Assassin's Creed* – instead merging narrative into the game..."

Gear-esque cutscenes, and without the clunky exposition of *Assassin's Creed* – instead merging narrative into the game seamlessly ala *Half Life*.

For the most part, the pacing is excellent. Those of you fortunate enough to have played the *Metal Gear* series will recall the perfect balance between action sequences and more relaxing info gathering sections. *BioShock* has a similar dynamic, with high octane encounters mixed with gentler, albeit tense, exploration, collecting chilling recordings from Rapture's warped inhabitants.

But the further you venture into

Rapture's underbelly, the more flawed the architecture of *BioShock* becomes.

Constantly respawning enemies are the biggest culprit here, after cleaning out a section, wasting a decent amount of your sparse ammunition to do so, clambering back into an environment minutes later to find it repopulated by more of the goons you just offloaded earlier is a little frustrating.

Also frustrating, in a completely different sense, is the use of 'Vita-chambers' (essentially where players will respawn if they happen to die). Let us give you an example – our first battle with

one of the many Big Daddies was an epic affair. Down to our last wisp of health, we could feel the end was near for either one of us, after unloading a clip into his steel innards he charged, knocking us clean off our feet to our untimely death.

Then we simply climbed out of the Vita Chamber, marched straight back towards our assailant and popped a flurry of bullets at him, dropping him easily.

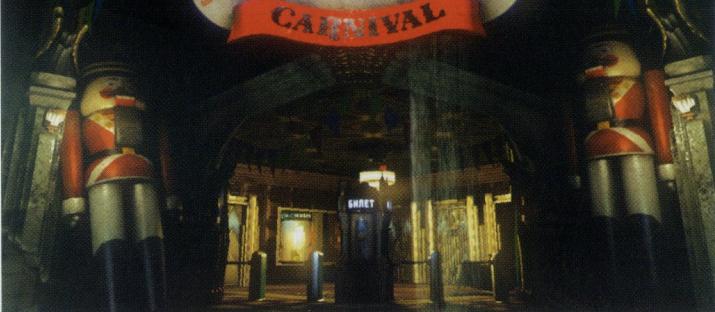
Instantly, all the tension from the previous encounter was lost – that tight sense of the life and death encounter immediately evaporated the minute we realised there was essentially no

punishment for dying, and conversely no real reward for playing smart.

SHORT CHANGED

Even more disappointing is the noticeable difference between the original 360 version and the PS3. *BioShock* was a visual feast when it was released in 2007, and while it still sparkles on the PS3, there has been a slight downgrade

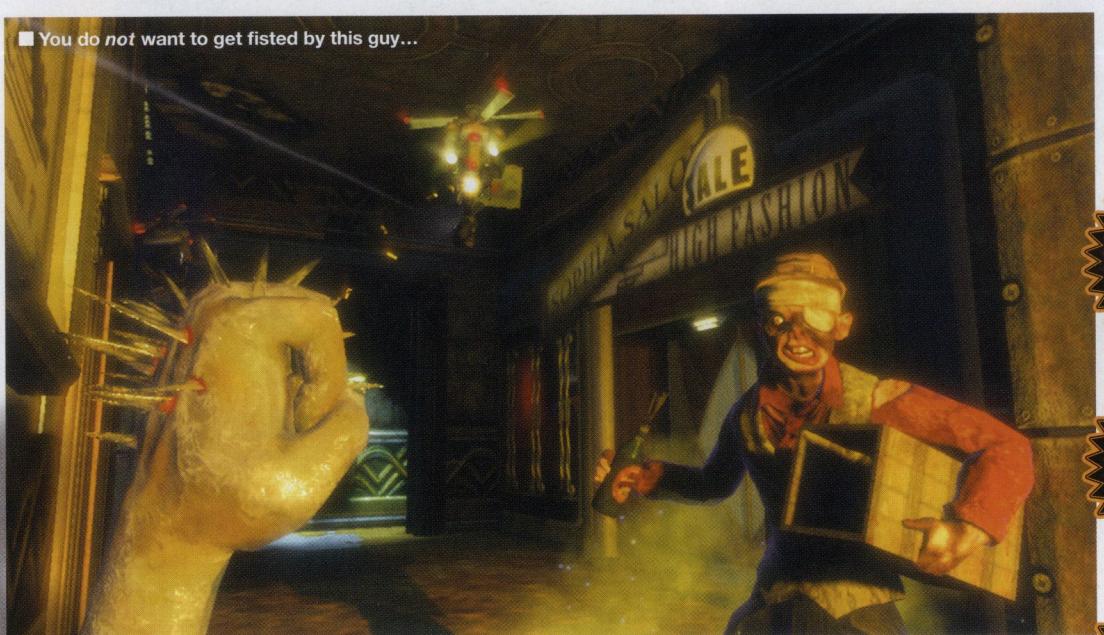
GRAND CARNIVAL



■ Feel the almighty power of my BOOM stick!



■ You do not want to get fisted by this guy...



visually – the lighting effects aren't quite as explicit, and it seems to have been rendered at a slightly lower resolution than upscaled.

Considering that 2K have had a decent amount of time to port the game we expected a little more – especially since the game features a huge install. The overall effect is a slightly 'fuzzier' vision of Rapture, which probably won't affect your experience to any real extent, but it's still an issue...

And while 2K make up for this downgrade via added content, this isn't as extensive as we had hoped. A new difficulty mode, and some new missions, is hardly a reason to repurchase if you've already played the game. *BioShock* was always more about the experience than the challenge. The added Plasmids are also available for 360 owners as DLC so it's difficult not to feel short changed.

It's a shame – because *BioShock* is really the epitome of a polished AAA experience. The AI (the Big Daddy/Little Sister relationship especially) is such that you're provided with a multitude of different experiences throughout. And bashing splicers over the domepiece with a wrench never gets old.

But the Plasmids are the real star of the show here – progressing through the game you can add or remove different abilities, essentially shaping the way you advance through the game, allowing you a genuine freedom of choice when it comes to combat situations.

And this choice is most evident when it comes to duking it out with the numerous Big Daddies plodding throughout Rapture. Almost everyone who plays *BioShock* will find a new, unique way to take down these ominous, clunking monstrosities, and the fact that the game caters to this choice is



■ At least I still have my dignity... oh crap – I'm naked!

PLASMID TV

Plasmids are incredible – get creative with these things and you'll have a blast.

TELEKINESIS

Pick up almost anything and throw them at your enemies – bottles, firebombs, dead bodies.

ENRAGE

Throw a weird snowball thingy at a splicer and they'll go crazy, attacking everything in their path – friend or foe.

TARGET DUMMY

Create a dummy clone of yourself, and chuckle as all the bad guys attack him instead of you.

HYPNOTISE BIG DADDY

Exactly what it says on the tin – hypnotise the Big Daddy and he'll treat you like a Little Sister!

undoubtedly one of its strong points.

The strongest point, however, is the sheer thematic depth of *BioShock*. Videogaming has been host to its fair share of inspired yarns, but few force players to ask questions of themselves in the way *BioShock* does. Sacrifice or self sacrifice? Freedom of choice, or force of will? Idealism or pragmatism? It's no exaggeration to say that *BioShock* is on a different level from 95% of gaming in terms of narrative.

It's just a shame we got it 14 months too late... **Mark Serrels**

PROS:

- Astounding environment
- Literate story

CONS:

- Graphical downgrade
- Too late

VERDICT: If you've never played it before, buy it now. If you have, think twice...

OFFICIAL SCORE:

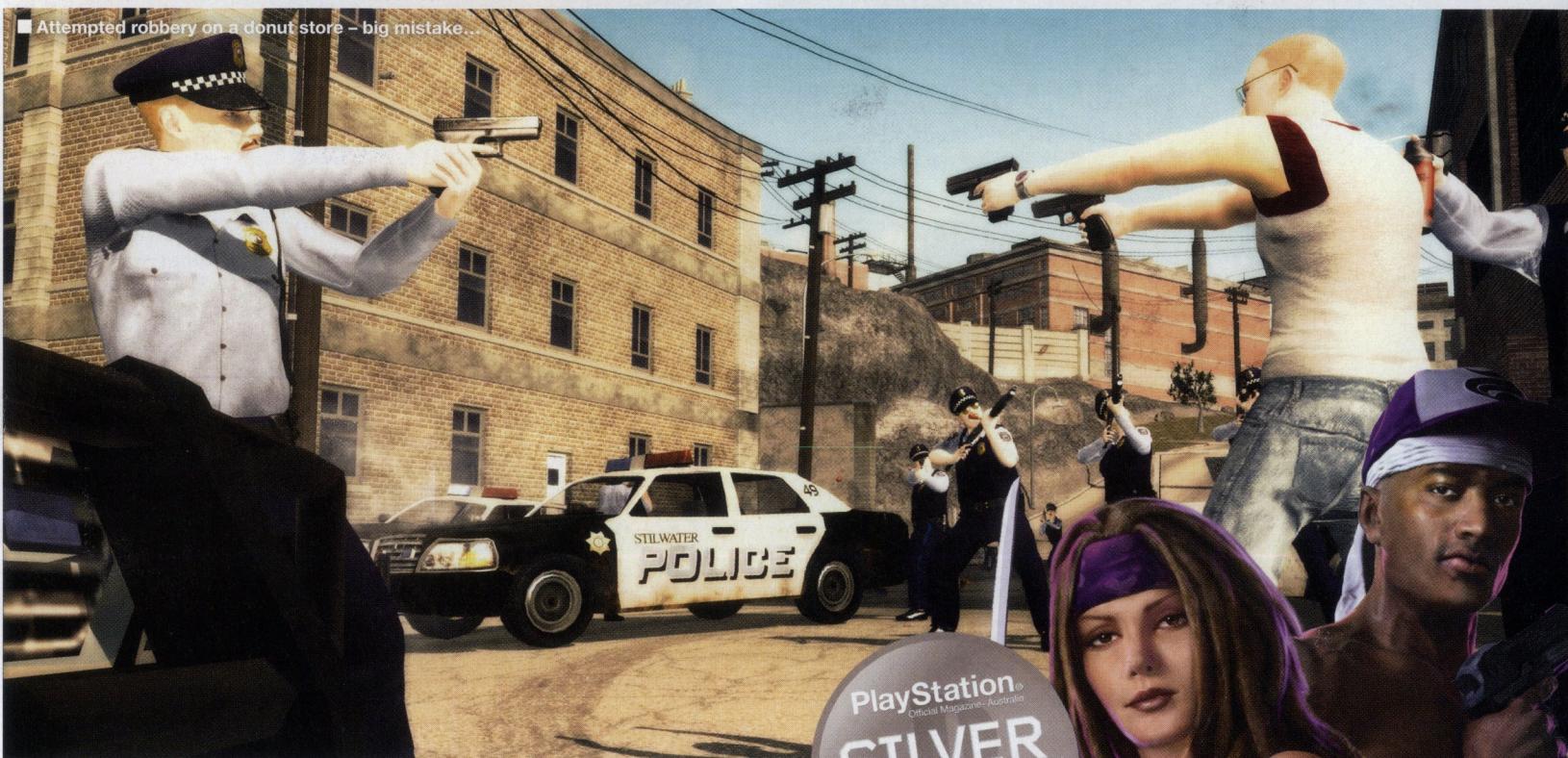
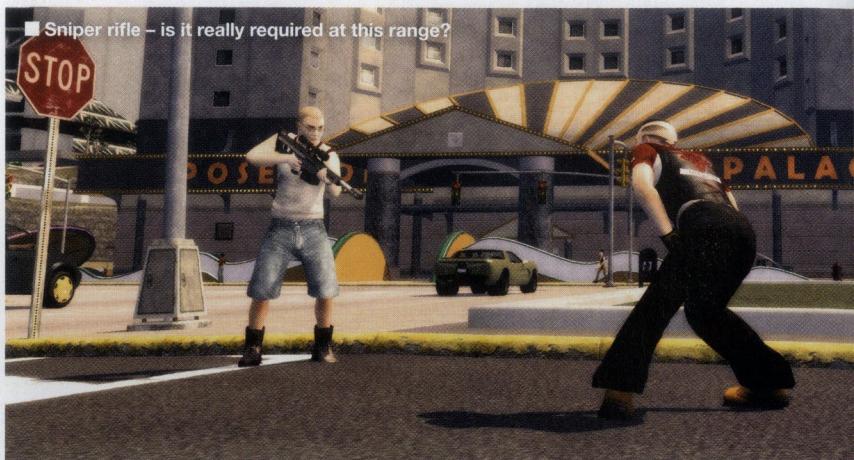
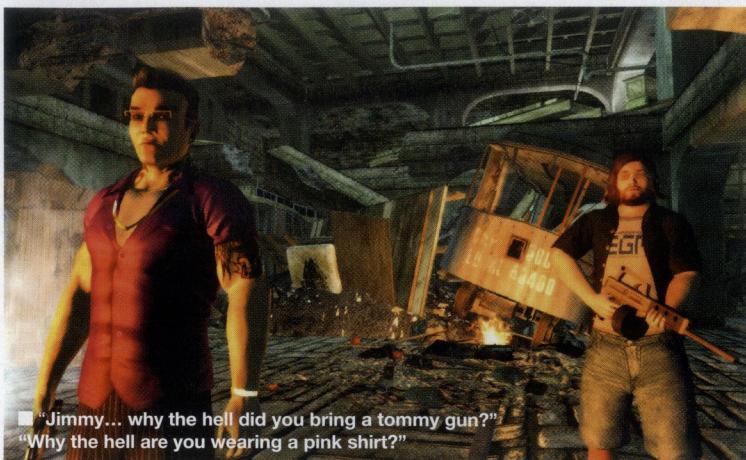
08

PS3 PS2 PSP REVIEW

■ GENRE: ACTION
■ RELEASE: NOW
■ DEVELOPER: VOLITION
■ DISTRIBUTOR: THQ

■ PLAYERS: 1-12
■ PRICE: \$99.95
■ HD: 720p
■ WEB: www.saintsrow.com

■ BACK STORY: *Saints Row* was an unashamed GTA clone when it debuted on the Xbox 360 two years ago. Arriving in the wake of *San Andreas*, it was difficult not to see its ludicrous gangsta stylings as anything but a cynical, blatant rip-off.



SAINTS ROW 2

Making a mess of the sandbox

This review was late. As in, I wrote it and submitted it well after my deadline. No doubt Ness and Mark were annoyed, but I really don't care. I was too busy playing *Saints Row 2*. Let me tell you a bit about that.

Sandbox games have been in vogue ever since *GTA III* ripped us a new paradigm seven years ago. We just love to have a sprawling playground to explore. Liberation is central to the appeal: a non-linear mission structure accompanied by a wealth of secondary activities tends to reduce the frustration of failure. You just say to yourself, "well I'll go and do something else instead".

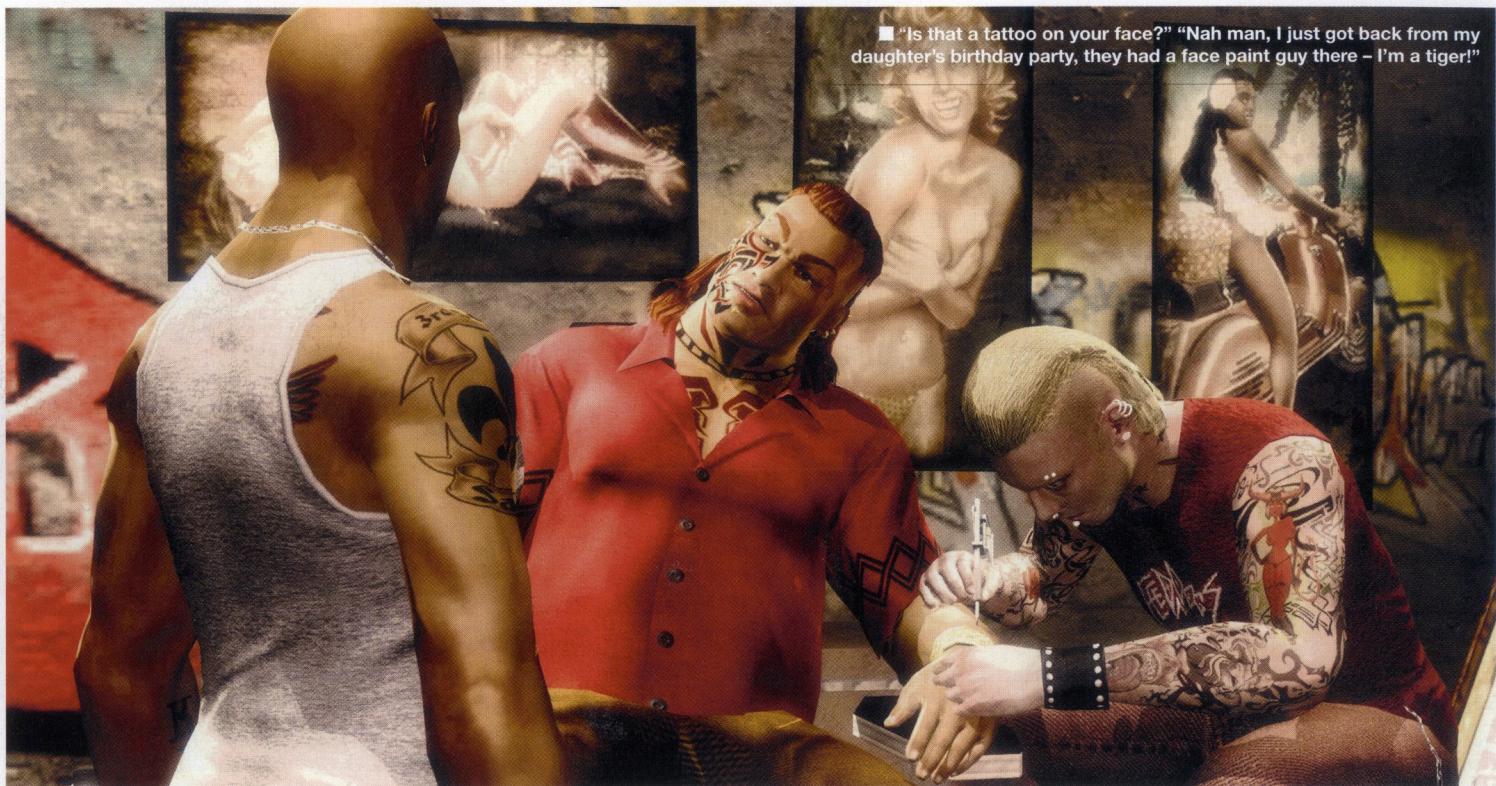
Complementing such freedom, the core play mechanics are often enjoyable

in themselves. Thematic concerns aside – as indeed, sandbox games span the disparate genres of high fantasy (*Oblivion*), the religious Crusades (*Assassin's Creed*) and, well, cars (*Burnout Paradise*), to name but a few – it's often just as entertaining to ignore the outlined tasks and simply tool around. To use *GTA* as an example, the formula is simple: open world (Liberty City) + responsive AI (cops, civilians) + multiple player tools (cars, guns) = enormous amounts of fun without even tackling the lengthy story missions.

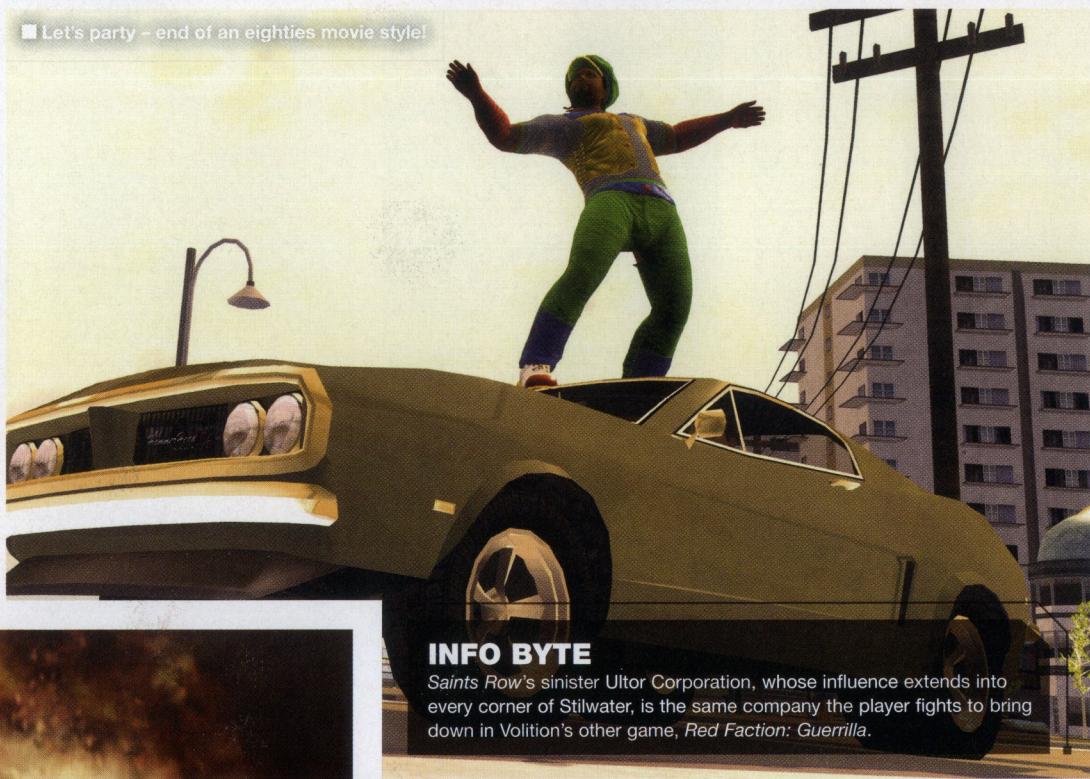
Which is where I ran into trouble with writing this review. It's so easy to get side-tracked in *Saints Row 2*. One moment you're driving to a story mission starting point... oh look, there's a street

race there, I'll just do that... hmm, maybe I'll pop into this plastic surgeon and reconfigure my look... hang on, now where was that story mission again? Never mind, I've found a ramp that looks like a stunt jump... and here's my chance to get footage for reality cop show FUZZ... but not before I've streaked through Stilwater University and fought off the rival gang making moves in my 'hood.

Saints Row 2 is a



■ Let's party – end of an eighties movie style!



INFO BYTE

Saints Row's sinister Ultor Corporation, whose influence extends into every corner of Stilwater, is the same company the player fights to bring down in Volition's other game, *Red Faction: Guerrilla*.

pure sandbox game. It's also colossally stupid. These two factors dovetail with such aplomb that there's always something to do, something to see, something to find and something to leave a ridiculous gurning grin plastered all over your face. You'll be spraying shit at houses in an effort to lower the property value of a neighbourhood. You'll be stealing hos from under their pimp's nose to work at a local massage parlour. You'll be firing rocket launchers from a chopper, BASE jumping off skyscrapers and recruiting gang members. You may even be doing it dressed as a giant hot dog.

Right from the character creation it's clear this isn't a game that wants

you to take it seriously. From tweaking brow depth, jaw lines and overall body muscle to choosing a movement style, taunt and insult animations, the range of customisation options for your avatar are staggering. I created a fairly convincing Scarlett Johansson, since I figured if I was going to be staring at this character over the course of the game then I'd probably want something attractive to look at. (At a preview event a few weeks back I designed a morbidly obese Asian dude with a spectacular quiff and mutton chops. He was called Sumo Elvis.)

The emphasis on customisation reaches into every aspect of the game. You can alter your avatar through plastic

IT TAKES TWO

Remarkably, the entire story mode is playable co-operatively. Two players can participate in every mission and every activity, which often alters not only the difficulty, but how each mission plays out. There are objectives and situations you'll only see if you play co-op, providing the perfect reason to play it through again. Better still, it's fully drop-in/drop-out, and you can import your own character.

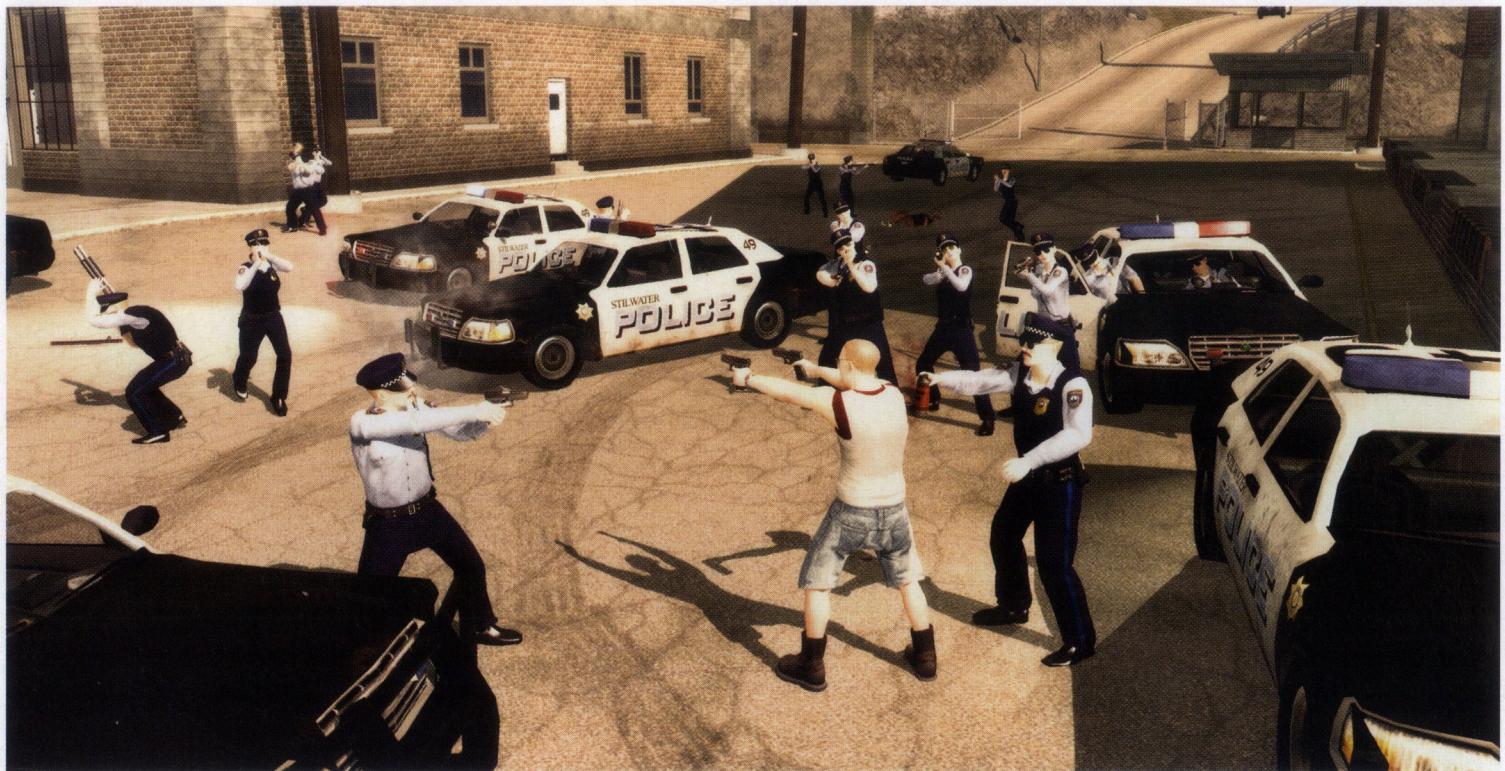


surgery, get a haircut, shop for new clothes, cover your body with tattoos and bling, pimp your rides for both performance and aesthetics – even upgrade your cribs with furniture. Most of these elements can be further modified through colour changes and the addition of logos and other minutiae.

It all succeeds on two levels. One, you feel personally attached to your avatar, your car, your crib and the world-at-large. Two, it generates a kind of Pokémon-esque 'gotta catch 'em all' incentive to keep exploring, keep discovering, and keep playing.

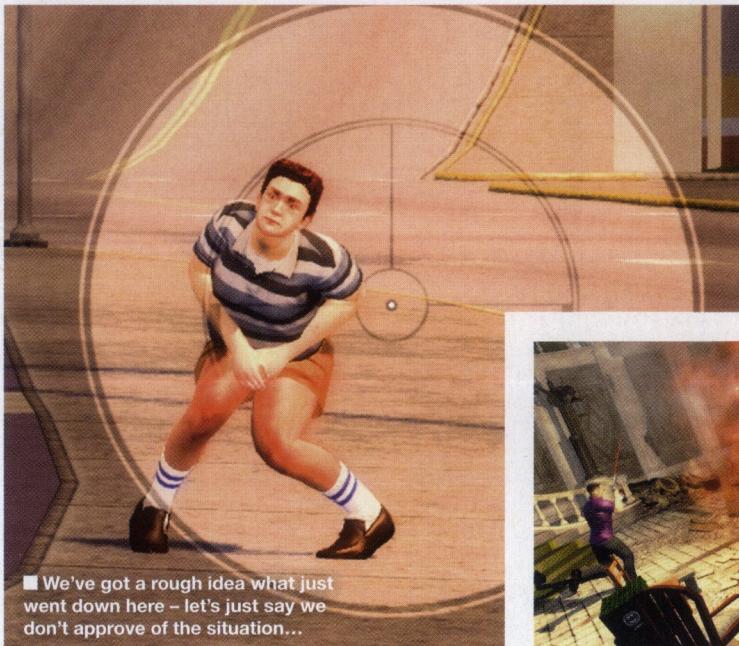
This feeds into the mission rewards and structure as well. Rewards come in





A CALL TO ARMS

Overshadowing the standard deathmatch modes, the multiplayer highlight is Strong Arm, a team-based battle for gang supremacy. Within one fully-populated location, Strong Arm cycles through various game modes as two gangs compete for money to buy the neighbourhood. Hitman sees the gangs trying to take down targets first; Insurance Fraud has you throwing yourself into oncoming traffic in rapidly changing hot zones; Snatch has you stealing hos from their pimps and delivering them to clients. The clever Tagging system splices things up: by finding and completing graffiti tags you can confer bonuses to your entire team. Stealth hides your team on the minimap; Police sends the cops to hassle your opponents; Nitrous makes your team's vehicles much faster. The sheer variety in maps, modes and tags should mean *Saints Row 2* multiplayer entertains for months beyond launch. (If only it had some sort of persistent skill boosts or class system, it'd be perfect.)



We've got a rough idea what just went down here – let's just say we don't approve of the situation...



the shape of boosts to your character's abilities. Progressing through the tiers of each activity will unlock bonuses that may improve your accuracy with firearms or increase the rate at which your health regenerates, for example.

Elsewhere, the feedback loop is obvious: the more customisation you do, the more respect (which functions as an economy of greater importance than mere cash-money) you earn. Even just messing around – picking random fights in the street or veering into oncoming traffic while driving – will boost your respect, albeit to marginal degrees. Respect unlocks more missions. Missions give you money. Money buys stuff. There's always a reason and an immediate reward for doing things, beyond the simple enjoyment of the action itself.

In action, *Saints Row 2* revels in the fact it's nothing more than a videogame.

There are no pretensions here towards high art; certainly no one could accuse it of having an "Oscar-worthy" script. This is a celebration of the absurd, the puerile and the balls to not be *GTA IV*.

Nothing here is realistic. Tap **L1** while driving and you enter Cruise Control, allowing you to comfortably target pursuing vehicles as your car automatically maintains its current speed. From the arcade vehicle handling (the **L2** handbrake turn always lets you negotiate a tight corner) to the ease of eluding the pigs (just start a mission or activity), it's all about enabling you to have fun.

It's to developer Volition's credit that they didn't look at the success of *GTA IV* and think to copy it. While Rockstar opted to focus on immersion through character-driven narrative and ambient environmental details, Volition stayed true to their own philosophy and turned

every aspect of the original *Saints* up to 11. Where *GTA IV* exchanged much of its craziness for a dose of the mundane, *Saints Row 2* only trades in insanity.

For me – and you knew this review would ultimately boil down to a comparison between the two games – it's best summed up this way: in the bars in *GTA IV*, you can play 'QUB3D', a conceptually interesting but fairly unexciting puzzle game; the arcades of *Saints Row 2* house 'Zombie Uprising', a brutal, bloody beat 'em up where you can chainsaw the undead in half. Which would you prefer? **David Wildgoose**

PROS:

- Over-the-top sandbox action
- Two player co-op

CONS:

- You might not dig its low-brow humour

VERDICT: A one-finger salute right up the arse of the free-roaming crime genre.

OFFICIAL SCORE:
09



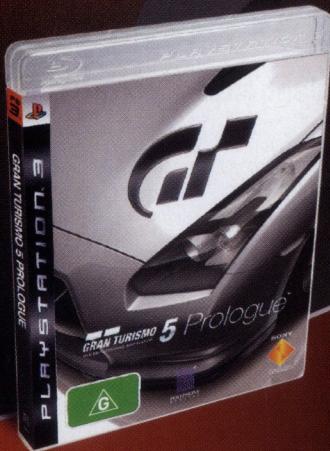
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HEAD TO HEAD

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This is living

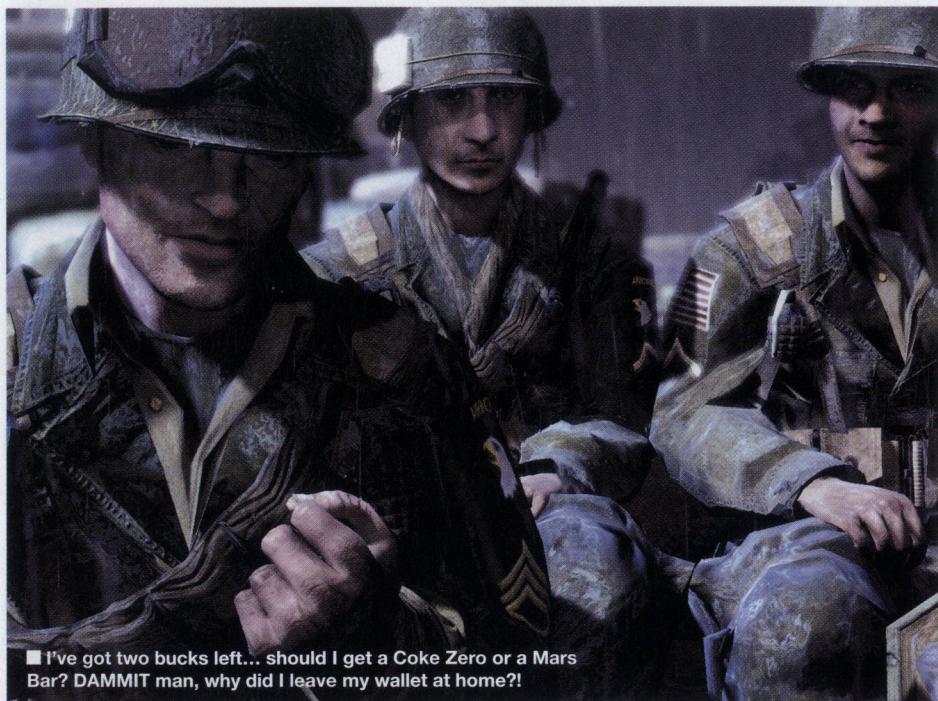
PLAYSTATION®3

PS3 PS2 PSP REVIEW

■ GENRE: SHOOTER
■ RELEASE: OCTOBER 2008
■ DEVELOPER: GEARBOX SOFTWARE
■ DISTRIBUTOR: UBISOFT

■ PLAYERS: 1 (1-20 ONLINE)
■ PRICE: \$109.95
■ HD: 720p
■ WEB: www.gearboxsoftware.com

■ BACK STORY: Gearbox Software brought out both *Brothers in Arms: Earned in Blood* and *Road to Hill 30* for last-gen systems. This marks the debut of the series on our saucy new hardware. The Gearbox boys are also working on *Aliens: Colonial Marines*.



■ I've got two bucks left... should I get a Coke Zero or a Mars Bar? DAMMIT man, why did I leave my wallet at home?!



■ War – a total sausage-fest...

PlayStation®
Official Magazine - Australia
BRONZE AWARD
8/10



BROTHERS IN ARMS: HELL'S HIGHWAY

Blast Nazis in Holland, score Dutch boobs. At least you'd hope.

Man, World War II must have been an absolute arse of a time to be around. If you weren't holed up in some European town getting bombed by ZeGermans (yes, it's now officially one word) you were roughing it out on a foreign battlefield with a crusty rifle trying to spring the German's cheese traps. It wasn't like playing *Quake* on a sofa armed with a Pepsi and a bucket of the Colonel's secret herbs and spices where the only real thing to worry about is how to get the bloody grease off your control pad.

No, dammit, this was war. Finally, *Brothers in Arms: Hell's Highway* (*BIA:HH*) takes up the Spielberg-esque mantle and sets out to recreate this guts-and-

balls slog through the heart of swastika darkness. It feels authentic, raw, and, if anything, succeeds almost *too* well.

WAR, WAR WHAT IS IT GOOD FOR? ERM, COOL SHRAPNEL STORIES?

Like its PS2 predecessors, *Hell's Highway* thinks it's *Band of Brothers* made videogame flesh. There's a lot of focus on the game's characters and relationships, but unfortunately unless you've played the last game you won't have any idea what to make of the cut scenes. "Who's that guy again? What are these two on about? What's the hoop-la-ha in regards to that pistol?" You get the idea.

Fortunately the basics of the set up require no explanation. As Sergeant Matt Baker, you're part of the 101st Airborne division sent in to fight your way through Holland, keep *Hell's Highway* open and deliver Hitler the wedgy of all wedgies.

FLANKING - SO HOT RIGHT NOW

It's how you go about this murderous European vacation that puts *BIA:HH* up there as your Granddaddy's favourite, though. Like in *Rainbow Six Vegas 2*, you're the boss of a bunch of gun-happy muppets keen to obey your every command or die trying. If you try to go all Buck Rogers and charge through each level on your own you'll promptly be shot by the legions of entrenched German

forces. The only chance you have is to manage the movements of up to three fire teams as you dig them in behind cover, order one team to lay down suppressing fire on enemies, and then order the others around for the flanking kill.

While there is occasionally a bit of variety that sees you ditch your squad while you flush a sniper out of a house, do a bit of sniping yourself, or take out enemy emplacements in a tank, it's the squad-based strategising that's the booze in the cocktail. In other words, if you're a *Call of Duty* fanatic who loves to charge into combat with the reckless abandon of a pissed Scotsman under a full moon, you're going to be over this after you cop your first bullet in the head.

■ Remember when Chuck wore the Hitler tache as a joke? Poor bastard didn't last five seconds. Haha! He's with the angels now...



INFO BYTE

According to *BIA: HH* lead guy, Randy Pitchford, this game has been in development in some form or another since 2002!

TEAM BOOM BOOM

Variety is also the spice of war. Each team you command has a specific ability they can use to kick arse. Your standard Assault team is good at staying mobile and flanking the opposition, but there are also Machine Gun teams for mowing down Jerry's like freshly cut grass, Bazooka teams which are great at destroying machine gun nests, and Mortar teams to rain hell from above. Just make sure you keep both teams alive or you'll have to wait till the next checkpoint for them to be resurrected.



“...you can't sit back behind a concrete shed eating a Snickers while your AI buddies do all the hard work.”

Fortunately there are a number of things to keep the above formula burning for those so inclined. For one, you've got to be in the mix getting your gun dirty. While your team mates can take out exposed enemies, they're rubbish at taking out bastards who are dug in. While some might see this as a big fat con, it means you can't sit back behind a concrete shed eating a Snickers while your AI buddies sweat it out. You're still the king killer, and there are lots of heads to be shot off and bodies to be broken – and yes, that sort of gore is present.

Secondly, some of the more enjoyable spurts of violence are the enemy ambushes. In *BIA:HH* you'll often happen upon packs of Nazi fuggers oblivious to you and your ghetto dogs lining up to send them to the boiler room downstairs. The better placed your

men are, the faster you'll smote all the bastards when you open fire. Taking six or so men out in a few seconds thanks to good planning is the gaming equivalent of a Swedish back massage. Thank you, Ursula!

COURT MARSHALLED

Ironically enough, Gearbox may have nailed the whole “WWII is hell” thing too thoroughly. While we totally enjoyed the first few missions, the slow slog of it all – the laying down of fire, grinding a few metres ahead, bit by bit – did start to drag. Plus the weapons of old aren't exactly the masterpieces they are today. The most accurate is your rifle, but as its zoom isn't great it leads to a fair bit of squint-and-shoot gunning. In other words, it all feels about as frustrating as the real thing probably was.

There are some other little irks, too. While your allies are fine when they're dug in behind cover, their path-finding skills are hopelessly inconsistent. Often we'd order our men to move out behind us to the area ahead, and instead they'd take the long way – right through the enemy's line of fire – to get there. Sometimes they'd survive, sometimes they wouldn't.

Finally, this is a perfect game for cooperative laughs – yet there are none. While we do get a multiplayer mode that

sees up to 20 players going hammer and tongs against each other, burning down Hell's Highway with a friend would've been a far better ride overall.

These gripes aside, *BIA:HH* is still the most accurate foray into WWII squad-based combat yet. It's not for those who can't stand tactical belt tightening, but it does a stout job of throwing you onto a 1940s battlefield and giving you a glimpse of what some of our grandparents had to hack through. **James Ellis**

PROS:

- Authentic flanking style
- Ambushing Nazis!

CONS:

- Feels like a slog at times
- No co-op? What?!

VERDICT:

The most authentic WWII shooter yet, but often at the expense of fun.

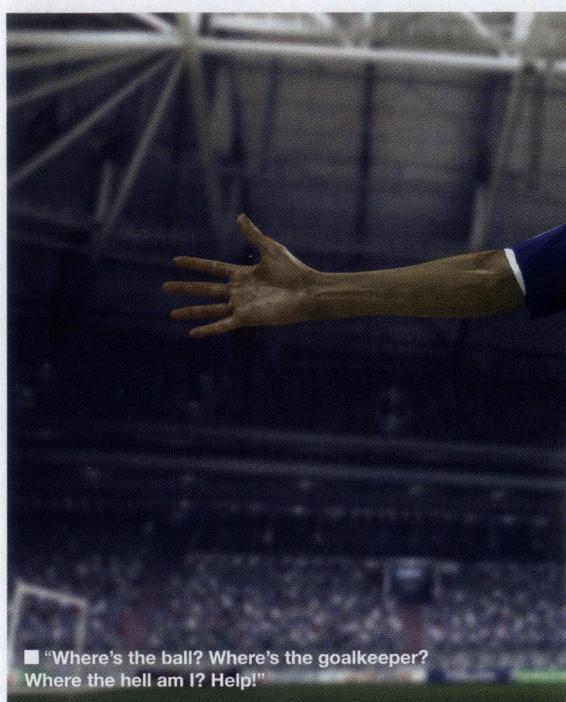
OFFICIAL SCORE:
08

PS3 PS2 PSP REVIEW

■ GENRE: SPORTS
■ RELEASE: NOW
■ DEVELOPER: EA
■ DISTRIBUTOR: EA

■ PLAYERS: 1-20 (ONLINE)
■ PRICE: \$99.95
■ HD: 720p
■ WEB: www.fifa09.ea.com

■ BACK STORY: *FIFA* has trailed behind its bitter rival *Pro Evo* for years, slowly gaining ground as Konami's critically lauded series spiraled into decline. With *FIFA* now playing sharper than ever before, could this finally be EA's season?



■ "Where's the ball? Where's the goalkeeper? Where the hell am I? Help!"



FIFA 09

The world player of the year

Déjà vu: the feeling of having previously experienced something *actually* being experienced for the first time. Also a feeling elicited every year around spring, as EA and Konami restart the soccer cold war, with gamers worldwide wondering if this year... maybe this year *FIFA* will finally outshoot, outpass and outplay the perennial champ *Pro Evo*.

But some things never change... or do they? As *Pro Evolution Soccer* stagnates, *FIFA* has been making baby steps towards victory. Last year's contest between the two soccer behemoths was tighter than the proverbial duck's arse, and with EA promising gamers the world, maybe it is

time for a switching of the soccer guard. Maybe this time, things *will* be different.

STATTO

Chucking in the disc for the first time, it's clear that *FIFA 09* is a game designed for those who genuinely love soccer – a game that, instead of shooting for the lowest common denominator, for the casual crowd, positively revels in the stat-wankery that hardcore soccer fans love.

And this time EA has cranked this aspect of the game into overdrive with the Adidas Live Season – a feature that uses stats from real matches week to week, and uploads them to the game itself, adapting stats to suit player form, thus providing gamers with the

most realistic soccer experience possible.

Although this kind of detail may verge on the gimmicky side, it demonstrates the lengths that EA will go to in their attempt to make *FIFA* the most authentic soccer experience on consoles. Only the keenest of experts will be interested in tracking this kind of extreme statistical fappage, but we're impressed nonetheless.

Of course this all means nothing if the game doesn't play a sharp game of soccer – thankfully, however, *FIFA 09* does.

GOING PRO

In many ways years of domination, mixed with a comfortable familiarity, has made it difficult for fans (including reviewers) to give

FIFA a chance over *Pro Evo*, leading to a weird, completely unjustified situation where one game was essentially being lambasted for not playing exactly like another.

And while *FIFA 09* has made concessions to *Pro Evo*, even going as far as to offer a secondary control system clearly designed to beckon over the die-hards, this is the year that we are tempted to recommend *FIFA* over *Pro Evolution Soccer* – not because it plays more like *Pro Evo* (which it kinda does), but because the level of detail in every aspect of the game results in the most immersive soccer title we've played thus far.

MOVEMENT OFF THE BALL

Quite possibly the greatest leap forward for



■ "I'm-a-runnin', I've got the ball, I'm-a-gonna score... wait. Everyone's gone!"



FIFA 09, and ultimately the improvement pushing it top of the table, is with regards to the animation system. Moving beyond visual impact, the way in which all the players move, the momentum they carry, and more importantly the realistic results of player collisions, are all calculated brilliantly, resulting in a soccer experience that rings true to the sport.

Every challenge, every timed volley and every crunching tackle not only looks correct, but feels correct – making each encounter completely rewarding.

In addition, the contextual animations of the players is simply spectacular – players making darting runs on the break will point to where they want the ball played, attackers steaming in for the cross will leap with momentum into the air, strikers attempting to pick a first time shot out of the air will respond exactly as they should, and this all adds to the realism and fun of *FIFA 09*.



THE BEAUTIFUL GAME

And of course, as always, when compared to the Wayne Rooney-esque *Pro Evo*, *FIFA 09* is a free flowing, annoyingly handsome David Beckham, surrounded thoroughly by screaming, gorgeous Asian girls, with a smug grin across his dial.

Yes, *FIFA 09* is a decent looking game.

But over and above the actual aesthetics, it's the incredible wealth of options that really pushes *FIFA 09* over the edge here, making the game impossible to ignore. Few sports games cater to its sport and its fans in the way *FIFA* does, and certainly none feature the prodigious amount of licensed content.

Then there's the huge variety of modes, most notably the 'Be a pro' (which can now be played 10 vs. 10 online). *FIFA* absolutely blasts the opposition away with this feature set, and really puts *Pro Evo* to shame. Usually it's *FIFA* playing catch up to *Pro Evo*'s superior game mechanics – but this time round *Pro Evo* has a hell of a lot of work to do if it wants

to match *FIFA* bullet point for bullet point.

And to be perfectly honest, we are very doubtful that it can.

Oh, what the hell, we might as well come out and say it before someone else does – unless Konami pulls a very big surprise out of the bag – this year *FIFA 09* is the best soccer game money can buy. There – we said it. For the first time in decades we can honestly say that *FIFA* is on top – it seems *Pro Evo* is going to have to play catch up for a change. **Mark Serrels**

PROS:

- Incredible animations
- Huge wealth of options

CONS:

- Still a bit sluggish
- AI can get wonky

VERDICT: The best soccer game on the market (phew, we said it...)

BIGGEST SOCCER CRY BABIES...

Soccer has its fair share of cry babies – here are a couple of typical examples:

C. RONALDO

Will someone give this guy a tissue for his issue? He may be the best in the world, but the dude cries if someone steps on his toes...



GAZZA

Was one of the greatest talents of his generation, but he cried in the World Cup, cried when he got married, and cried, well, all the time really.



JOHN TERRY

Oh my. Champions league final. Penalties. John Terry steps up to take the deciding shot. He runs up... he slips on his arse. Then cries.



OFFICIAL SCORE:
09

PS3 PS2 PSP REVIEW

■ GENRE: RACING
■ RELEASE: OCTOBER 2008
■ DEVELOPER: BLACK ROCK STUDIOS
■ DISTRIBUTOR: FUNTASTIC

■ PLAYERS: 1-16
■ PRICE: \$99.95
■ HD: 720p
■ WEB: www.purevideogame.com

■ BACK STORY: Formerly known as Climax Racing, Black Rock Studios was responsible for one of the original Xbox LIVE benchmarks with *MotoGP*, now the team has moved from two wheels to four with the promising *Pure*.



PURE

The surprise hit of the year?



Deep breath... okay – *Pure* has way too much onscreen HUD, the loading times are far too bloody long, it suffers from DJ Atomica syndrome (in that it has an uber-cheesy American giving you half arsed instructions ala *Burnout Paradise*), plus it's often guilty of patronising gamers – loading us up with redundant instructions that are unnecessary and frequently irritating.

Oh, and yeah, there's no splitscreen.

Aaaaand that's pretty much all that's wrong with *Pure*. Now that all that nonsense is over and done with, let's get on with talking about how incredible this new title really is.

Pure is a rare commodity, the kind of game that gets dropped onto our desk with nary a modicum of hype, the kind of game you slide into your PS3 without the slightest hint of anticipation, before being thoroughly blown away by a package that

comes pre-packaged and shrink-wrapped in its own awesome juices.

That's how we felt when we first got our paws on *Pure*, but now, after playing the finished product, we're in awe with regards to just how seamless the game is. In some ways, in many ways, *Pure* is 2008's *SKATE* – a potential sleeper hit that does almost everything right, without even the slightest inch of fuss.

Almost casually, *Pure* makes all other arcade racers on the market seem a bit rubbish in comparison.

YOU ARE SO BEAUTIFUL

Most obviously, visually, *Pure* is a very striking title, in many ways completely outshining what we've seen from every other game in its genre – including, believe it or not, *MotorStorm*.

Developers Black Rock Studio have played it extremely smart with *Pure*. The

ATV models – and the actual characters themselves – seem to command most of the processing juice, while the environments (which you'll often be too busy whizzing past) have been given a little less attention, but still feature enough gorgeousness to elicit the odd "ooh" and "ah" as you hurtle through the scenery at unlockable speeds.

And the frame rate, which you would expect to take a hit at the expense of all these subtleties, remains smooth and constant throughout, allowing players to really indulge in all the smaller details that make *Pure* all the more immersive: the shirt flapping in the wind, the dust billowing in your wake. Technically, *Pure* is quite the marvel.

SPEC-TRACK-ULAR

In many ways, however, the track designs themselves tend to outshine the visuals,

working brilliantly in tandem with the game's mechanics and flexible camera to create a real sense of speed, scale and vertigo completely unique to *Pure*.

And while most racers seem content to stay on the straight and narrow, *Pure* dares to utilise the third dimension to its fullest potential, with designs that climb endlessly into the horizon, before launching players into impossible leaps, swooping swiftly into sharp declines, maximising the potential for trickery and breakneck speeds throughout.

The dynamic camera is possibly the biggest revelation here – darting into tight angles, accentuating every leap, and making even the most pedestrian of corners feel like an epic struggle against mud and nature. It never gets in the way, and is seamlessly implemented – it's a smooth, slick, brilliantly judged addition to *Pure*.



"Ignore this game at your peril – don't miss out..."

BAG O' TRICKS

As if it wasn't enough that *Pure* is, at base, a brilliant racer with some of the best track design in recent memory, it also just so happens to have an intuitive trick system, and the kind of brilliantly balanced game mechanics that can propel a new IP into orbit.

Simply put, pulling off tricks increases your boost bar and increasing your boost bar gives you access to more intricate

tricks. From that point you can either use the boost (limiting your access to the intricate tricks) or store it, allowing you to perform more complicated tricks, thereby increasing your boost exponentially.

It works like a charm, and provides a new layer of depth to the proceedings. At first the trick system may appear shallow, but once you discover tweaks, flips, pre-loading, boosting into jumps, alternate routes, and special tricks

■ "Hey, you're going the wrong way!" "Oh yeah? Maybe everyone else is going the wrong way – did you think about that?"



TWEAK IT

The trick system in *Pure* is deceptively simple. To begin with, a simple direction and button press will be enough to pull off tricks. As your boost bar increases you'll gain access to different trick buttons, eventually unlocking a special. But, in addition, players can also pull off tweaks that allow you to pull off flips, and take your trick to the next level. Pushing either **A** or **B** whilst tricking will add a new dimension to a trick – a handstand, for example, will become a one-handed handstand. As Elzar from *Futurama* might eloquently state – crank it up a notch: BAM!



■ We could(n't) totally do that...

you'll be exposed to whole new vista of possibilities within the race environment. While the trick system could have come off as tacked-on and gimmicky in *Pure*, it ultimately adds a whole new layer of strategy to the game.

THE REST

Although the absence of splitscreen sticks out like a sore, fluorescent red thumb, in many ways it's the game's only real major flaw. *Pure*, like the original *MotorStorm* before it, is the kind of game you want to pull out when you have mates round, and the fact that you can't partake in a bout of local multiplayer madness is easily *Pure*'s greatest misstep, but the game

makes up for it with numerous avenues for replayability.

The online mode, for example, allows for 16 player online races. The ability to create your own custom ATV from absolute zero is a rewarding diversion, and the variety of tracks, and potential for secret routes, is enough to satisfy anyone smart enough to pick this title up.

We haven't had this much fun with an arcade racer since the original *MotorStorm*, and in many ways *Pure* surpasses that previous benchmark – to the extent that we are left wondering how the competition will be able to compete. Ignore this game at your peril – don't miss out. **▲ Mark Serrels**

PROS:

- Amazing track design
- Perfectly balanced

CONS:

- No splitscreen
- Loading times

VERDICT: The best arcade racer on the market bar none.

OFFICIAL SCORE:
09

PS3 PS2 PSP REVIEW

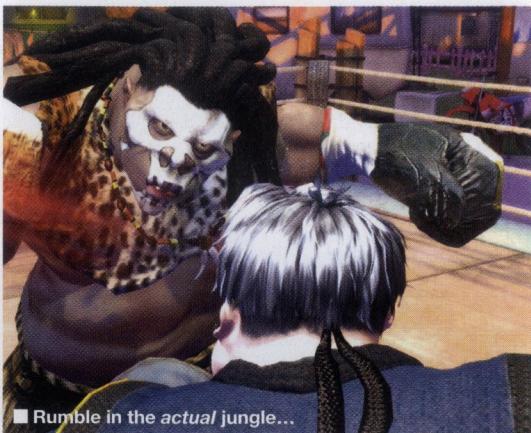
■ GENRE: FIGHTER
■ RELEASE: NOW
■ DEVELOPER: EA CANADA
■ DISTRIBUTOR: EA

■ PLAYERS: 1-2
■ PRICE: \$99.95
■ HD: 720p
■ WEB: www.ea.com

■ BACK STORY: EA Canada has a long history with sports titles, developing a slew of games over the years, this, coupled with the fact that they worked on *Fight Night Round 3* and the *SSX* series, should have seen this title pack a little more punch...



■ Karate Kid 4: Cobra Kai Never Say Die...



■ Rumble in the actual jungle...



SMASH WHITE TRASH!

One feature that keeps making it back is the 'put any face you want on your character' addition. Using a webcam or downloading a photo to EA's servers (an arduous task, ye be warned) you can create or recreate anyone you want. We know we touched on this before, but after seeing the Kim Kardashian skin in the demo, we thought a rich bitch, sex-tape, brouhaha could be the go. Hilton vs. Kardashian for skankiest skank on the Sunset Strip... no matter who's victorious... everybody wins!!!



FACEBREAKER

I'll get inside your face!

To call FaceBreaker a boxing game would be like trying to claim *Burnout* is a racing sim. It just ain't gonna happen – leave reality at the door and indulge in a little bit of face breaking. This game is about as real as Pammy's jugulars, but fake isn't necessarily a bad thing, at least at the start it isn't. Has FaceBreaker got the chops (like *Rocky*), or will this reviewer lay it out on the canvas (like *Rocky V*)?

We grudgingly admit that it was a split decision on this bad boy. There's much to like about FaceBreaker – the whole ridiculousness of it, the caricatures each boxer represents, the simplicity of the controls, the damage that the character models take on after being beaten to a bruised and bloody pulp each round, the overt idiocy of the ring girls and just the general kooky tone. rocked the spot.

However, there is a lot that feel like a blow below the belt. The fighters lack

a sense of balance – now we know this isn't realistic, yet certain characters have a fairly easy to pull off stun move which then leaves you vulnerable to a couple of free shots.

Great if you can pull it off it quickly, it turns the tide in your favour and leaves your opponent begging for a Facebreaker, but when you're on the receiving end (especially from Steve, he is one tough bastard to beat) you just get frustrated and crack it. You never seem to be able to string combos together like the AI does, and while the playing field is levelled in multiplayer, the single player campaign will have you tearing out your hair in frustration and disbelief.

The gameplay is simple. You've got high and low attacks for combos, a block and parry button (which works sweetly if your timing is right) and then the 'breaker' button. Unleashing this at the end of a combo, or while your opponent is stunned, releases a

bonebreaker, groundbreaker or, lastly, a Facebreaker animation. These involve a move which leaves your adversary in the air hurtling to the ground, pummelled into the ground or, after being prompted to "hit 'em again" or "break his face", leaves you delivering a punishing blow and then it's goodnight Gracie.

There is a lot to dig about this title, but the unbalanced single player mode really leaves us wanting. As far as duking it out with your mates (especially with the face mapping feature), this can be a cracker of a title, just wait until the bargain bins at your local store are chock full of this one. **Dave Kozicki**

PROS:

- Great look
- Bruising and battering

CONS:

- Unbalanced play and characters

VERDICT:

Although multiplayer rocks, the single player loses its shine rather quickly...

OFFICIAL SCORE:
07

■ GENRE: SHOOTER
■ RELEASE: OCTOBER 2008
■ DEVELOPER: TRAVELLER'S TALES
■ DISTRIBUTOR: WARNER BROS

■ PLAYERS: 1-2
■ PRICE: \$89.95
■ HD: 720p
■ WEB: www.legobatmangame.com

■ BACK STORY: The LEGO franchise has succeeded in charming the pants off everyone – including us black-hearted reviewers. Can they continue this run of success with *LEGO Batman*? All bat-signals point to yes!

PS3 PS2 PSP
REVIEW

LEGO BATMAN: THE VIDEOGAME

I'm the goddamn LEGO Batman

If you happen to be discussing good timing, then the release of *LEGO Batman* would be right up there with the time we bumped into Krystal from *Big Brother* doing pilates in the our local gym (true story!). What magical timing.

Because *Batman* fever is running high right now – the hype machine is in full throttle, *The Dark Knight* is currently the biggest movie moneyspinner since Leonardo Di Cappuccino got steamed up with Winslet, and Heath Ledger is now duking it out with James Dean, Jimi Hendrix and Steve McQueen for coolest dead dude ever...

In this environment, could a *Batman* game, fuelled by the effortless fun of the LEGO conveyor belt be anything other than a roaring success?

Well, yes and no. Since LEGO games are usually exactly what you expect of them (a simple, casual co-op gaming

experience), the strength of the game usually lies in the kitsch value of the franchise it parodies. So, in short, if you are a big *Batman* fan, you'll find a lot to love about this title, otherwise you'd probably best be served by the *Star Wars* or *Indiana Jones* iterations.

Because on the one hand, having played through all the other LEGO titles released previously, we're beginning to tire of the staple, same game/different skin, formulaic gameplay experience espoused by Traveller's Tales. But, conversely, we find it hard to hate and understand that there are plenty of *Batman* fans just waiting to eat this game up with an enormous bat-shaped spoon.

There's plenty this game does right. Traveller's Tales have done a great job of squeezing the varying visions of *Batman* into one product, combining the gothic madness of the Burton movies, the harsh

vigour of Nolan's recent version, and the camp of the TV show into something that all fans of *Batman* will relate to.

In terms of the actual game mechanics themselves, however, it's easy to get bored of *LEGO Batman*. If you've played one LEGO game you've essentially played them all – there's nothing notably different in this iteration that hasn't featured in another game in the now extensive LEGO franchise.

But you'd have to be dead inside to not feel a slight twinge in the cockles of your black, black heart as you play through *LEGO Batman*. The initial charm of the series may be wearing a little thin, but it still exists, especially if you're a fan of the goddamn Batman.

If you're not a fan, however, just wait until Traveller's Tales find another franchise to plunder – and hop back on the bandwagon then. **Mark Serrels**

LEGO WISHLIST...

If you love the series it rips on, you're guaranteed to love the game. Now that *Batman*, *Indy* and *Star Wars* have all been given the LEGO treatment, we're seriously spoiling for *LEGO Back to the Future*, *LEGO Goonies*, *LEGO Tango & Cash* and, if possible, a *LEGO Lethal Weapon*. Oh, and Traveller's Tales, if you're listening/reading – please avoid 'LEGOising' the following: *Sisterhood of the Travelling Pants*, *Legally Blonde*, *Sex and the City*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Superman Returns* and *The Mummy*.



INFO BYTE

New to the *Batman* franchise? *LEGO Batman*, uses its loading screens to introduce the backstory of each villain...



■ "Where the f*ck did they hide my lucky charms?!"



PROS:

- Perfectly charming
- Represents Batman well

CONS:

- Too similar to other LEGOs
- Seen it all before...

VERDICT

Fans of *Batman* will love it, others may want to wait until the next LEGO title.

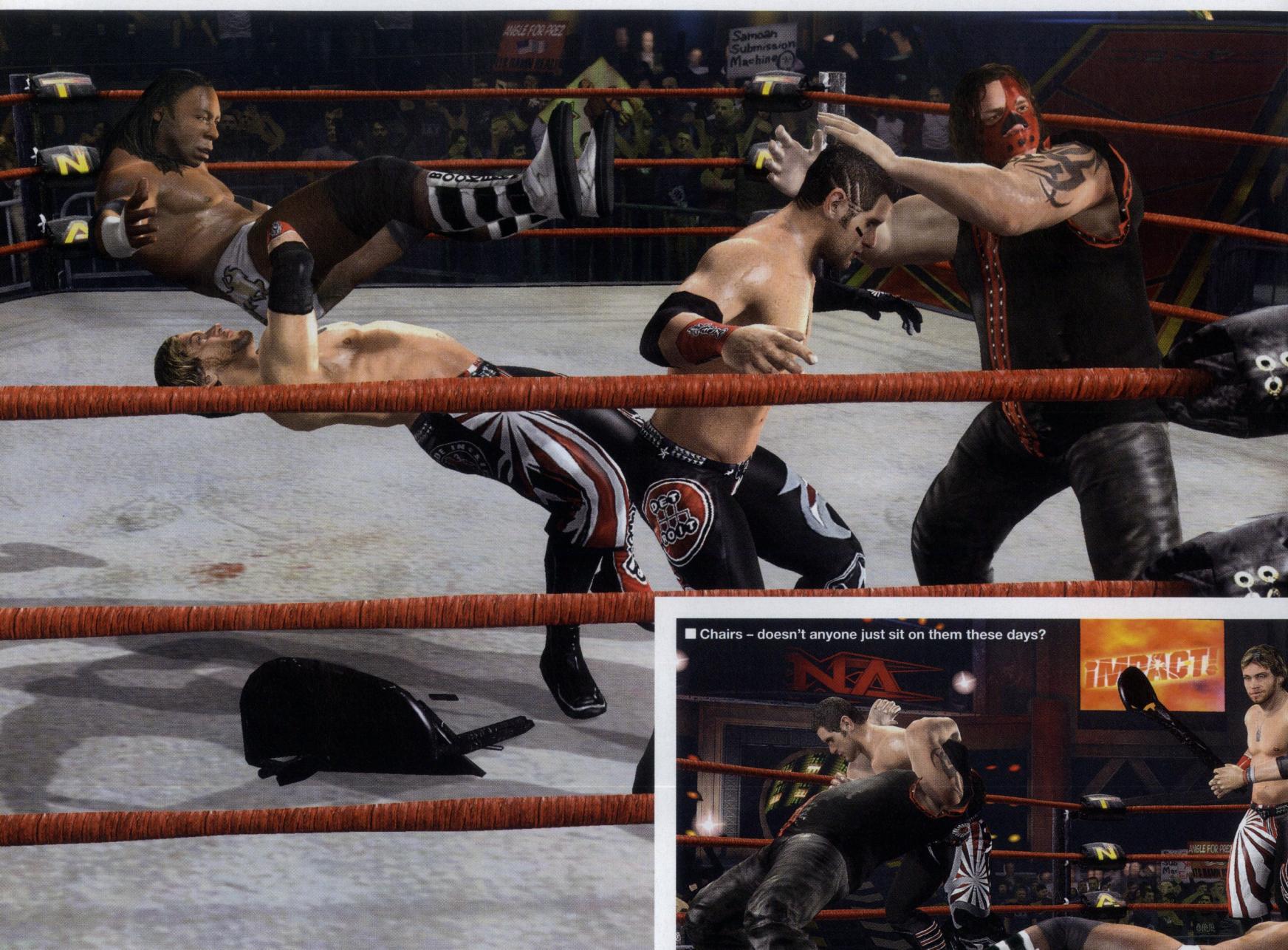
OFFICIAL SCORE:
07

PS3 PS2 PSP REVIEW

■ GENRE: SPORTS
■ RELEASE: OCTOBER 2008
■ DEVELOPER: MIDWAY
■ DISTRIBUTOR: RED ANT

■ PLAYERS: 1-4
■ PRICE: \$109.95
■ HD: 720p
■ WEB: www.midway.com

■ BACK STORY: No, it doesn't stand for Tits n' Arse. Instead, Total Nonstop Action Wrestling was coined and started back by ex-WWE superstar Jeff Jarrett and his daddy, Jerry. They've since brought superstars Kurt Angle and Booker T into the fray.



TNA iMPACT!

Get greased up, half naked, and ready for some bloke-on-bloke pounding

If there was a bookie for videogame success this outsider would've been paying long odds. Given the paltry improvements we all saw in the last WWE offering there was little hope that a title based on the subordinate TNA competition was going to amount to anything more than panty filler. As it turns out, *TNA iMPACT!* isn't a buy-on-sight gaming comet by any means, but throw it under the magnifying glass and it's clear this punter will become a contender over the next couple of iterations if Midway can keep adding to the brew.

TNA iMPACT!'s best parts can be given a right groping moments after roaring into the ring. Arcade gurus that

they are, Midway have crafted a concrete and simple control setup for your suplex pleasure. There's a couple of strike buttons, one for grabbing, and others that take care of running and reversals. It's pick-up-and-piledrive stuff and makes for a nice change after the wishy-washy grappling system of the WWE games. You won't, for instance, have to put up with the sort of button-juggling tripe that sees you put your opponent in a figure-four leglock instead of going for the pin.

Such tight controls also help to nail the fluid feel of wrestling and minimise control pad abuse. Perhaps the most frustrating thing to endure in a wrestling game is when you find yourself comatose

in the ring after being sat on by a wrestler with more body fat than a humpback. All you're left to do is mash the buttons, hoping, praying, that your bloke will eventually get up at some undisclosed time. That's not the case here, where everyone has a stun meter that winds down after you've copped some pain.

A special shout out goes to the reversal system, too. You can reverse just about every move in the game if your timing is right and the subsequent animations are always on the money. You can also reverse a lot of reversals. Our only gripe with the system is that the AI gets back-alley cheap using this sh!t in tougher bouts, though that's probably to

be expected from a game like this...

After such a buff foundation, however, things start to landslide quickly. While we don't have beef with what made it into *TNA iMPACT!*, we do with what didn't. Which is a lot.

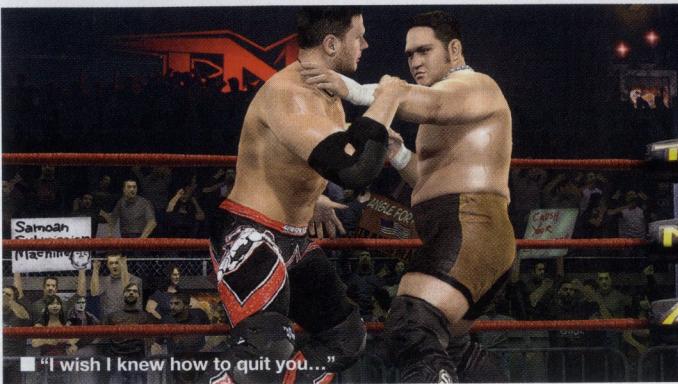
For a start, the 25-strong roster of wrestlers is predictably scrawny. While big names such as Kurt Angle, Scott Steiner, Kevin Nash and Booker T are present, few would be familiar with the rest of the crew. There are also no silicon bunnies, ex-stripers, or muscle-titted she-hulk wrestlers in the list at all – disappointing for those who like to finish a fight with a lacy g-string in their mouth. And don't we all... don't we all.

INFO BYTE

Don't expect this to be a hardcore fiesta! There's only one weapon available for use in the entire game – a metal chair. Boo.



“...this punter will become a contender over the next couple of iterations if Midway can keep adding to the brew.”



We could've got by with such a cosy unknown mob had they all pimped their own distinctive style in the ring, but unfortunately we've seen more variety in a bucket of apples. A lot of the wrestlers seem to flaunt the same bodyslam, German suplex, leg drop and – well – everything. While there's some variety depending on the sort of wrestler you choose, having big names like Sting and Kurt Angle possess similar move sets is about as acceptable as power slamming your granny on pavers. It's just not right.

And don't assume you can waltz into the create-a-wrestler mode and come out with a fighting peacock. You can't. While there is a create-a-wrestler option, it's downright anaemic. We mean, come on, what wrestling game doesn't grant you the provision to alter the height of your behemoth? If you want to make a ghastly

beast that looks like he could wear Andre the Giant as a scrotum cloth, you should be able to. Instead you're limited to selecting from three wrestling body types. That's not even half baked, more like still in the deep freeze.

Along with no bloody moves, no bloody wrestlers and no bloody create-a-wrestler options, there are also no bloody match types. Options such as submission and FCA aside, there's only standard, tag and 'Ultimate X' available. While the Ultimate X match is undoubtedly the best of the bunch, the tag matches are flat out ruined by broken AI.

The only things left are the story and online modes. The former sees you take on the role of a masked wrestler responsibly called Suicide. After becoming the king of the ring, you're promptly put in your place by some wrestling

bruised who knock a bout of amnesia into you and leave you at the bottom of the wrestling world trying to work your way to the top. There's little drama along the way, rarely any commentary during these fights, and on the whole it feels cheap. Online is, as always, what you can manage to make of it. Provided you can find someone else who has this, you might be able to have some fun, but given the overall appeal of the game that's a big proviso for us in Oz.

X MARKS THE SPOT

Despite the poor amount of modes, at least we get Ultimate X. We've seen similar stuff before in WWE games, but this time you have to climb up the turnbuckle, then shimmy along a cable above the ring, before untangling a suspended 'X' symbol. Your opponent can either grab you and yank you down for a huge slam, or climb up there and instigate a high-wire kicking duel. How lovely.



As we've said, we're happy with the decent foundations that *TNA iMPACT!* has laid out, but the content – which is a big deal in wrestling games – is paltry. The bad news is that this makes *TNA iMPACT!* at best a rental for the wrestling curious. The good news, however, is that there's definitely a huge amount of promise here for future releases, provided Midway can add bucketloads of content in the sequel. *WWE Smackdown vs. Raw*, you have been warned. **James Ellis**

PROS:

- Tight, arcade style of biff
- Robust reversal system

CONS:

- Not enough wrestlers, moves, anything.

VERDICT: *TNA* is an up-and-coming hopeful. Here's hoping the next release has more *iMPACT!*

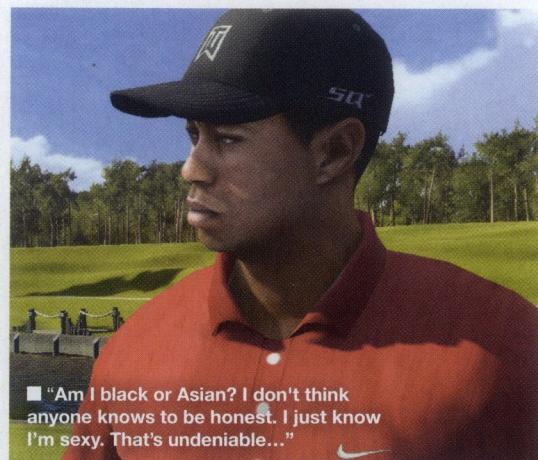
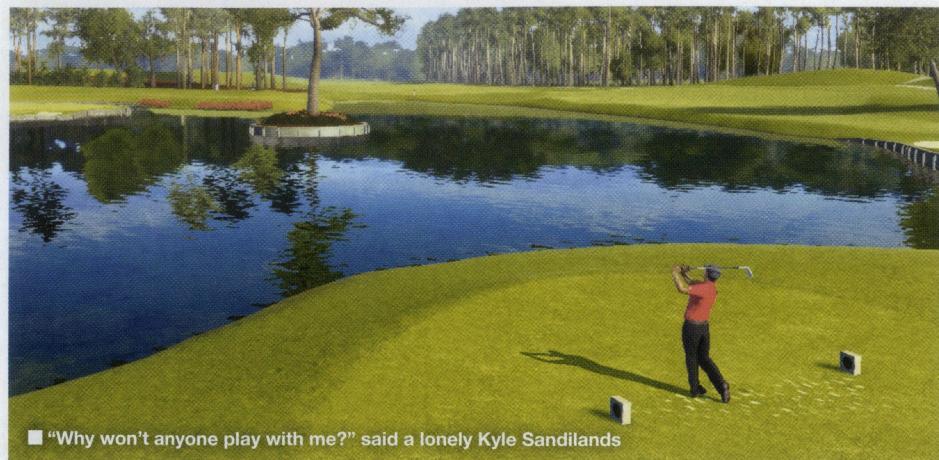
OFFICIAL SCORE:
06

PS3 PS2 PSP REVIEW

■ GENRE: SPORT
■ RELEASE: NOW
■ DEVELOPER: TIBURON
■ DISTRIBUTOR: EA

■ PLAYERS: 1-4
■ PRICE: \$99.95
■ HD: 720p
■ WEB: www.easports.com

■ BACK STORY: Tiger Woods is one of the most successful professional golfers in history. He has won 14 majors and 65 PGA Tour events. Woods made nearly \$800 million from 1996 to 2007. He can also walk on water. Fact.



TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 09

Can't see Woods for the trees – he hooked his drive!

PlayStation
Official Magazine Australia
BRONZE AWARD
8/10

If you're the kind of faithful fan who grabs these yearly sports titles blindly, the good news is that *PGA Tour 09* is actually a bit of a hit. Sure, it lands a few balls in the rough, but these are soon washed clean as you grab your stick and work it hard... um, in the game, of course.

Whilst Tiger Woods looks as beautifully sculpted, in-game, as the chunk of man hunk that he is in real life, the guts of the game lies in creating your own (inevitably grotesque) custom character with whom you'll try to impress the crowd by sinking your balls in small holes (a bit like last weekend's pub crawl, but for prize money).

Once you've got your red-haired, freckled monstrosity sorted, it's time to say g'day to Tiger's coach, Hank Haney. He's a bit of a slave driver, but he'll help you out by giving you drill exercises after each major tournament to improve your game.

PGA Tour 09 has a new stat system that sees your power, accuracy, short game and putting skills increase or decrease dynamically, depending on how you play. Consistently do well and they'll head upwards. Bork it big time, however, and they'll drop faster than you can say 'double bogey'.

Another new addition is the ability to tweak your clubs with the 'Club Tuner' (bet you wish you had that in real life eh?). Entering the driving range, ol'

Hank is on board to help you extend the distance you can hit a ball with each of your clubs. This extra power costs you part of the Sweet Spot, the downwards/upwards swing-path on the left thumbstick when you take a shot, so striking a balance is important. It has quite a large impact on your golf game and is a great addition for personalising the experience.

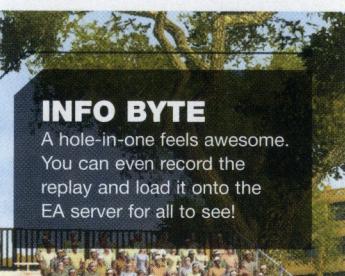
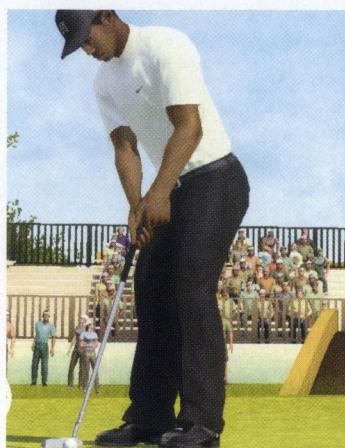
Whilst *PGA Tour 09* won't be winning any awards for its graphics and voice acting – the two commentators, whilst serviceable, really do sound bored out of their skulls – it's the sheer amount of stuff you can do in the game that impresses.

In addition to Quick Play and Career options, you have a return for Tiger Challenges, where you must complete nine mini-challenges before taking on a pro golfer, eventually facing off against (read: losing to) Tiger himself.

Throw in a bunch of mini-games, such as Putting Contest, T.I.G.E.R., Target, Closest to the Pin Contest – plus an online mode that allows for simultaneous play (with real-time colour arcs representing the other players' strokes) – and you have the complete golfing package. Even if you've never stroked a shaft in your life, *PGA Tour 09* offers enough variety to appeal to almost any gamer. **Dylan Burns**

THIS IS A CHALLENGE...

If you're connected to the EA servers when you play, you'll come up against quite a few GamerNet challenges in your single player game (including challenges set by your online friends). These often require you to drive the ball a certain distance or get close to the pin. Succeed and you'll get points for your online EA account.



PROS:
■ Heaps of modes
■ Can tweak your shots

CONS:
■ Graphically sparse
■ Bland voices

VERDICT: A surprisingly deep and addictive golfing experience...

OFFICIAL SCORE:
08



PlayStation® 2



inside everyone there's a SingStar

Whether you're a Diva, Rocker or Hip-Hopster there's something for you and all your friends with this hot mix of chart stunners! Grab the mic and choose tracks from the hottest lineup of artists yet – including Fall Out Boy, Fergie, Mika, My Chemical Romance, Nelly Furtado, Operator Please and Sneaky Sound System. SingStar Hottest Hits, available now on PlayStation® 2.

More SingStar fun also available on PLAYSTATION® 3

PG

Mild sexual
references,
Coarse language
and Themes

singstar

singstargame.com



■ GENRE: ACTION
■ RELEASE: NOW
■ DEVELOPER: DAY 1 STUDIOS
■ DISTRIBUTOR: ACTIVISION

■ PLAYERS: 1-12
■ PRICE: \$99.95
■ HD: 720p
■ WEB: www.activision.com

■ BACK STORY: Day 1 Studios are new kids on the block, and are now making the earth move with *Fracture*. So far they've been scared, shaken up, maybe they should work on the next LEGO outing and add 'going to pieces' to their repertoire.

FRACTURE

Ain't all it's cracked up to be....

You can almost hear it, can't you? The deep baritone of the voice-over artist rumbling as images of the futuristic war zone, synonymous with this genre, permeate your vision. The year is 2161. Global warming has had a devastating effect. Split down the middle by the Great Flood, the once United States has now divided into two warring factions. In the west, led by a power hungry General, the Republic of Pacifica dabbles with DNA, reconstructing the human genome. Opposing them, in the east, the Atlantic Alliance delves into cybernetics. At the centre, one man, alone – Mason Briggs. A renegade soldier, with exceptional terrain-altering weaponry is our last hope to deal with this world gone mad, and bring the General to justice. (R.I.P. – Don LaFontaine)

I FEEL THE EARTH... MOVE... UNDER MY FEET...

So now we've given you a preview of what's to come, howsabout the play-by-play, eh? There's a lot to like about *Fracture*. The weaponry is unlike anything we've ever seen before, and has a dramatic effect on how you play the game. If you don't know the deal, as we stated above the USA is in the midst of a civil war. Each party has used science to unlock new abilities, yet both are using

terrain-manipulating devices. Your arsenal is equipped with pulses and grenades to raise the ground or lower it for an elevated position. You can create towers to achieve this goal, to raise platforms, or get to those hard to reach places.

It's a bold take. By utilising localised seismic activity you're changing the face of your battleground to suit you and your allies. This doesn't play like a traditional third-person shooter. You could probably skirt through it without over-using your earth shattering (sorry) new powers, but it is tough. Even on the easiest setting (see DO THE KNUCKLE SHUFFLE) it's a decent challenge, and on hard? Forgedaboutit! You really have to develop your tactics and use the weapons and ground at your disposal. By flicking **L1** or **R1** you can raise or lower terrain, create a wall for your troops to hide behind, allowing them protected fire. It's all about strategy, and it's one of the things we really dig about *Fracture*.

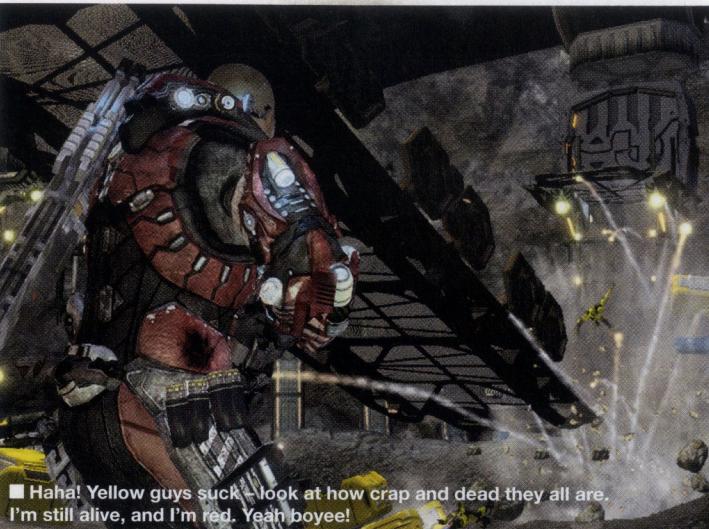
SHAKEN...NOT STIRRED

Most weapons you have are the stock standard deal, with a twist. You've got a rocket launcher that shoots a spiralling payload, the usual sniper rifles, shotguns and grenade launchers with supercool futuristic names like 'Raptor'. Our fave is the 'Black Widow'. This little beast shoots

■ I'm bald. Bald people are more badass. Everyone knows that...

INFO BYTE

The narrator sounds a bunch like the chick that narrated the *Animatrix*, and gives the game an air of familiarity and a touch of sexified coolness to boot.



■ Haha! Yellow guys suck – look at how crap and dead they all are. I'm still alive, and I'm red. Yeah boyee!



■ Bald, futuristic soldier shoots stuff – whatever next?





up to six grenades that can be detonated one at a time or all at once. It's nice to strafe a whole area with, wait for the enemy to close in and BOOM!

We also have to mention the little burrowing masterpiece, the ST-3 Torpedo Launcher. This thing moves underground like Jaws, stalking its prey, until you detonate it... awesome! The vehicles, though not a major part of the game, also have similar weaponry unique to *Fracture*.

SHAKE, RATTLE 'N' ROLL

The puzzle elements of *Fracture* are also surprisingly satisfying. There's no tutorial or hand-holding, you just get presented with a situation (usually after dying going through a force field etc) and need some lateral thinking to unlock it. Like, lowering or raising a power grid to nullify a force field or lifting the floor beneath a turret

and having it explode in its own protective barrier. These aspects can't help but put a smile on your dial.

WE'RE SENSING A BIG BUT COMING...

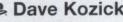
And you'd be right. This is by no means a perfect game. There are some particulars that confounded us as much as Paris Hilton and Lindsay Lohan's popularity. There's a sprint mechanic similar to the roadie run in *Gears of War* (c'mon, we know some of you have it). The problem is you can't angle or strafe or fire – it's just a straight dash. Even when you're moving normally, you feel like it's in slow motion 'Six Million Dollar Man' Steve Austin style.

It also suffers from horribly unbalanced targeting when zooming in. The number of times we clicked the thumbstick to zoom in, were bang on target, popped off a couple of rounds, and found we'd taken out a chunk of wall just out of our peripherals, or worse, missed completely (we know what you're thinking, and no, we

rarely miss here at OPS). It just took the jam out of our donut.

Our biggest problem is with the two gaming concepts. It almost has a bit of a multiple personality disorder. Don't get us wrong, the terrain stuff is certainly cool, but we were more intrigued by the opposing direction the two halves of the US went.

Imagine if it delved into the differences more, and focused on weapons for each faction. You could have crazy tech weapons for the Alliance and enhanced bio-suits and maybe a more plasmid *BioShock*-styled approach for Pacifica. That would have really sent our pulses racing, rather than just touching on it, and shuffling it to the background.

All in all, *Fracture* is a solid game – third-person shooter veterans will get a kick out of it for the new twist on an old classic. Newbies will find it a challenge, and we appreciate the boldness of Day 1 for trying something risky to break from the norm.  **Dave Kozicki**

DO THE KNUCKLE SHUFFLE

Noobs beware! If you're not that familiar with third-person shooters, you may want to ease into this one. Even on 'casual', it puts up quite the fight. We found our fingers going gangbusters on 'normal'. More guards, check. Rampant terraforming, check. Spikes and grenades going off everywhere, check! This is no rush in guns blazin' shooter. Co-ordinate with your allies and seriously use your environment or it's bye bye.



PROS:

- Decidedly unique weaponry
- Fresh game mechanics

CONS:

- A little bland at times
- Steep learning curve

VERDICT:

Multiplayer pushed the score up, but the overall experience left us wanting...

OFFICIAL SCORE:
07

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FILM

We've got some variety show shenanigans with *Space Ghost*, Captain Jack hits on anything with a pulse in *Torchwood*, we take a look at the Governor-ator, a hit of anime and get a little spaced out with Pegg and Frost.



DVD OF THE MONTH

SPACED SEASONS 1&2 (M)

■ STARRING: Simon Pegg, Jessica Hynes and Nick Frost

■ DIRECTOR: Edgar Wright

Sure you all know the Holy Trinity (Simon Pegg, Nick Frost and Edgar Wright) from the exceptional horror comedy *Shaun of the Dead*, and we watched them rip Bruckheimer, Simpson and Bay a new one in *Hot Fuzz*, but what many of you don't know is that our trio didn't begin there.

A long time ago in a series far, far away, at the turn of this century, greatness was born. This was the first outing for the boys, and, nearly 10 years on, it still holds up as one of the funniest series that has ever been produced for the box. After being brutally dumped by his ex, Tim (Pegg) has a chance encounter with Daisy (Hynes)

whilst apartment hunting. Having difficulty procuring a residence, the two of them concoct a plan to pose as a couple to secure a specific flat.

You can see where this is going, can't you? After moving in together, many wild and wonderful situations present themselves to our dynamic duo, usually smattered with pop culture references and infrequent drug use, and the obvious and necessary sexual tension, all shot with Wright's unique visual flair. The cast is extremely well balanced (or unbalanced if you will) with the landlord a right mad old bitty, with a crush on the eccentric

conceptual artist who lives in the basement, and Daisy's best friend Twist is as superficial as they come, and loves to put her down at every conceivable opportunity.

Keep an eye out for Nick Frost as Tim's best mate, Mike, a crazed, overzealous gun-nut who is slightly overprotective of his buddy.

VERDICT: Weird, trippy, psychedelic at times, but always quirky, funny and excellently shot. Go back and see where it all began...



WHOA!!!

Classic flicks focus on wild times, partying to excess and absurd situations, whilst exploring alcohol/drug-culture. Here's the best of the best.

DAZED AND CONFUSED

A coming of age story about a group of freshmen at a university. The usual hazing and experimentation ensues. Watch for great performances by Milla Jovovich, Ben Affleck and Matthew McConaughey.

HALF BAKED

Before *Chappelle Show*, Dave had a cult hit with this reefer inspired comedy. To get a mate out of jail they sell medicinal marijuana to raise bail. Hilariously funny with brilliant cameos.

BEERFEST

After stumbling across a secret beer drinking Olympics, a pair of brothers compete with their misfit team to redeem their family name and win one for the US of A.

HUMAN TRAFFIC

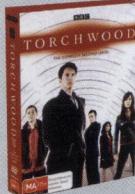
Centres around a group of club hitting pals, all going through an early-life crisis. Attraction between mates, impotence, jealousy and a surprising amount of honesty. Watch for the introduction to spliff-politics!

HAROLD AND KUMAR

A quest to get baked and eat some simple fast food goes horribly wrong with mismatched buds Harold and Kumar. A cameo fest with Neil Patrick Harris stealing the film.

SCI FI**TORCHWOOD SEASON TWO (MA15+)**

■ **STARRING:** John Barrowman and Eve Myles
■ **CREATOR:** Russell T Davies



A spinoff from the long-standing *Doctor Who*, *Torchwood* has a more adult and sexual edge. This is helped out by the charismatic, walking boner known as

Captain Jack Sparrow... err... Harkness, played by John Barrowman. His "nail anything with a heartbeat" philosophy, man, woman or alien, has you rolling your eyes to the ceiling, yet inexplicably giggling to yourself, all at the same time. Focusing more on a coherent storyline this season as opposed to the general snogfest that was season one, has shifted the series in the right direction. This is an entertaining romp for those who like their sci-fi with a more mature slant.

■ **VERDICT:** Lacking that special something that its parent, *Doctor Who*, consistently delivers.



BRITISH AUTEUR MIKE LEIGH IS A BIT OF A LEGEND, GAINING NOTORIETY FOR SATIRISING BRITISH MIDDLE CLASS ATTITUDES. CHECK OUT CLASSICS SUCH AS *ABIGAIL'S PARTY* AND *SECRETS AND LIES* FOR FURTHER VIEWING...

SCI FI**VEXILLE (M)**

■ **STARRING:** Colleen Clinkenbeard, Travis Willingham and Christine M Auten
■ **DIRECTOR:** Fumihiro Sori



If you recognise the name of the director of this dose of anime goodness, you get 10 points. Fumihiro helped produce the awesome *Appleseed* movie. Now given the reins, he weaves a new tale of infiltrating an isolated and secretive Japan of the future. Japan has closed off its borders for the past 10 years, focussing on developing technology internally. When the rest of the world comes knocking, what marvels or horrors will await them? In an interesting twist, Paul Oakenfold, who helped out Fumihiro scoring *Appleseed*, returns to dole out some tunes for this flick, which gives it an upbeat edge.

■ **VERDICT:** A solid addition to the growing list of anime we're exposed to. A little too similar to *Appleseed*, but entertaining none the less.

**COMEDY****SPACE GHOST: COAST TO COAST SEASON THREE (PG)**

■ **STARRING:** George Lowe, C. Martin Croker and Andy Merrill
■ **CREATOR:** Michael Lazzo

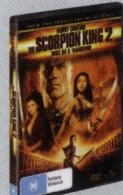


Though out of the league of *Harvey Birdman*, this pseudo talk show format has proved entertaining over the last couple of years. The usual cavalcade of celebrities talking to cartoons ensues with the incessant bickering between Space Ghost, Moltar and Lokar. We love that they've taken that "mom and apple pie" Hanna Barbera cartoon look from the 60s' and perverted it. Third season guests include Pat Boone, Chuck D, Tony Bennett and the irrepressible and always funny Jon Stewart. The 15-minute run time works a treat, and much like *Robot Chicken*, it gives you a quick serve of gold before you start to lose attention.

■ **VERDICT:** Sharp and funny, yet slowly starting to lose a bit of its edge.

**ACTION****THE SCORPION KING 2: RISE OF A WARRIOR (M)**

■ **STARRING:** Michael Capon, Randy Couture, Karen David and Simon Quarterman
■ **DIRECTOR:** Russell Mulcahy



The original *Scorpion King* kicked arse. The story had more holes in it than Swiss cheese, but it had the sexiness of Kelly Hu and the awesomeness that is The Rock! This direct to DVD prequel, however, doesn't, and it shows. Even the extreme talents of Aussie director Russel Mulcahy (who gave us the cult classic *Highlander*) could do little to save this, though we have to admit there are some decent action sequences. Here's the gist. After seeing the evil Sargon kill his father, our hero sets out on a quest to avenge his death. Keep an eye out for UFC champ Randy Couture as Sargon.

■ **VERDICT:** Crap, crap... crapola!!! When watching, brain optional.

**IRON MAN (M)**

■ **STARRING:** Robert Downey Jr.
■ **DIRECTOR:** Jon Favreau



After being kidnapped, weapons manufacturer Tony Stark has a change of heart, and seeks to defend the weak with an advanced metal suit. But not everyone embraces the new Stark...

■ **VERDICT:** Downey Jr. is surprisingly entertaining as both Stark and Iron Man.

**TRANSFORMERS (M)**

■ **STARRING:** Shia LaBeouf
■ **DIRECTOR:** Michael Bay



Giant transforming robots, searching for a bountiful energy source, become intertwined with a high school loser looking to be more than meets the eye. Megan Fox provides the hotness.

■ **VERDICT:** A case of style over substance, but who cares? Enjoy the ride.

**THE 40 YEAR OLD VIRGIN (MA)**

■ **STARRING:** Steve Carell
■ **DIRECTOR:** Judd Apatow



When three workers discover an associate is a virgin, it becomes their mission to instruct and educate him in the art of seducing women. Crass, perverted and piss-your-pants hilarity doth ensue with gusto.

■ **VERDICT:** Funny as all hell, with a surprising amount of truth and heart.

**DARK CITY (MA)**

■ **STARRING:** Rufus Sewell
■ **DIRECTOR:** Alex Proyas

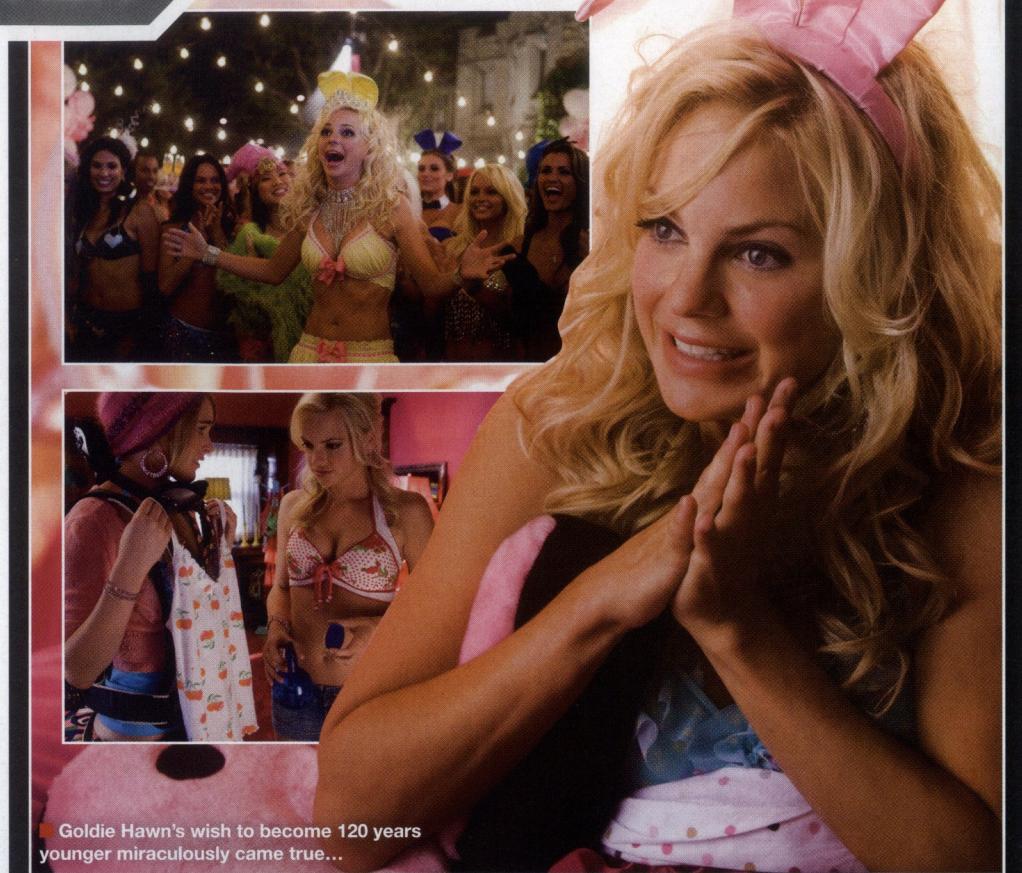


The follow up to *The Crow* didn't connect, but a superb cast and fantastic special effects pushed it over the line. Rufus Sewell caught in a dreamlike world makes for compelling viewing.

■ **VERDICT:** Visually stunning, but lost a little in the storyline.



FILM



Goldie Hawn's wish to become 120 years younger miraculously came true...

CINEMA

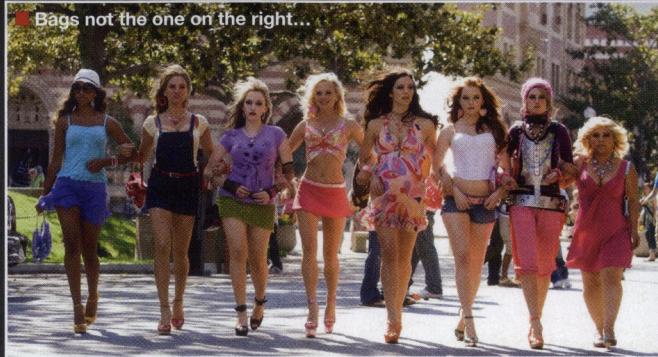
THE HOUSE BUNNY (PG)

■ DIRECTOR: Fred Wolf
■ STARRING: Anna Faris, Rumer Willis and Hugh Hefner

A cautionary tale of what happens to Playgirls inconsiderate enough to let themselves age. Anna Faris plays Shelley, a bunny who just lost her bunny-hole (the Playboy mansion), her Playmates and her dear old Heff. Taking dumb blonde to the extreme, this poor, scantly dressed and uneducated bunny finds lodging in the next best thing: a run-down sorority. Her pitch? "Hi, I'm Shelley and I'm going to be your house mother." Luckily for her, the inhabitants of said sorority are in desperate need of social skills, which, remarkably, is something Shelley can actually teach them! Turning misfits into life-sized Barbies, Shelley hits a speed bump when she finds a boy who isn't just interested in her water bra, fake tan or platform heels. What's a girl to do? Can the sorority girls save the day? Tune in next week folks!



Bags not the one on the right...



COMING SOON

BOND: QUANTUM OF SOLACE

■ **Starring:** Daniel Craig
Ever wonder why Australia's in a drought? If we were living in the world of 007, it would be because environmentalists are stealing everyone's water supplies. Thank God Bond is here to save the world yet again (equipped with all his sexy cars, of course).

ROCKNRROLLA

■ **Starring:** Nonso Anozie
Russian mobster sets up real estate scam, which has London's criminal underworld trying to get their share. Gerard Butler plays One-Two, a gangster playing both sides, and Ludacris and Jeremy Piven star as Americans trying to break into the UK music scene. Not quite Sparta, but we'll take it.

DEATH RACE

■ **Starring:** Jason Stratham
Jason Stratham plays a con forced to participate in a lovely little tea party called the Death Race. Convicts are chosen, and the rules are simple – there are no rules. Napalm explosions, smashed monster cars and charred corpses galore.

BUZZ

The latest movie murmurs from home and abroad...



TMNT LIVE ACTION

No, we're not referring to the live action 80s flick that saw a bunch of guys wearing costumes, we're talking about a brand new turtle! Creator Kevin Eastman believes that although the CGI version did well enough to warrant a sequel, he'd like there to be a re-invention of the characters (much like what they did with *Batman*). Though nothing's official yet, the characters will do the film *Dark Knight* style, with the introduction of the Shredder and their darker beginnings becoming the focus. Wonder if the house-dwelling foursome will even get to say 'Cowabunga' with all this serious talk?



PORN- TURNED- COMEDY?

Seth Rogen (*Knocked Up/Pineapple Express*) and his female buddy Miri (Elizabeth Banks) are a

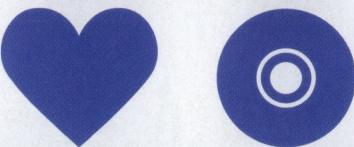
little strapped for cash. What are they to do? It appears that making a pornographic film comes next in their logical train of thought. Kevin Smith (responsible for *Clerks*, and playing 'Silent Bob') looks like he's somehow roped Apple fanboy (I mean, spokesperson) Justin Long into doing a cameo. Oh, and same goes with Randal (Jeff Anderson, *Clerks*) and Jay (from *Jay and Silent Bob*). Unfortunately due to the colourful nature of the *ahem* language, viewers will most likely have to be legal adults for *Zack and Miri Make a Porno*.



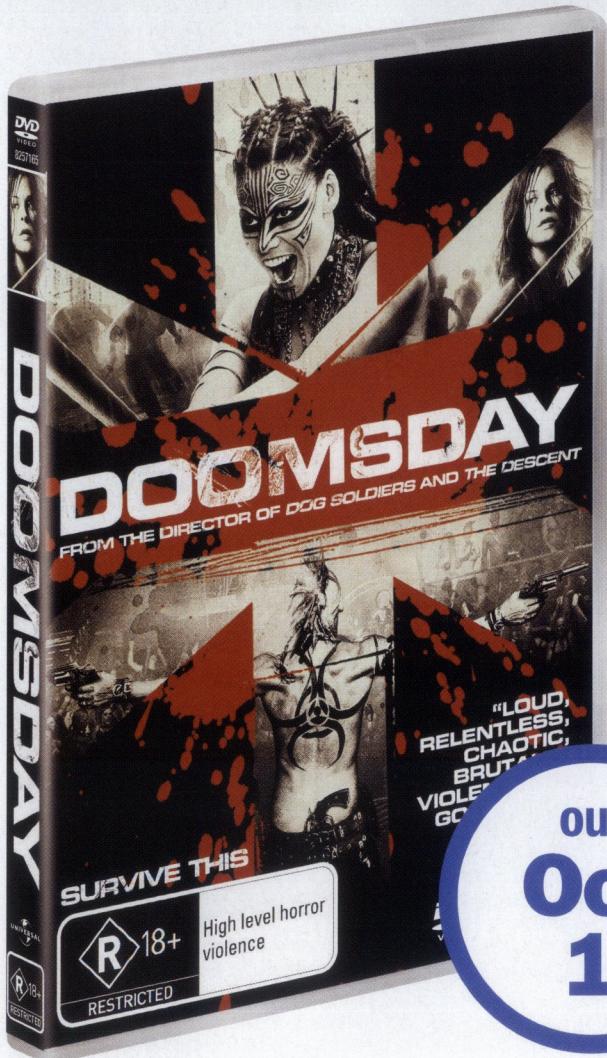
PUBLIC ENEMIES

Notice how everyone LOVES (like, really, really loves) that dirty looking thespian Johnny Depp? It seems everyone's talking about him... worshipping him, etc. And so help us God, the hype won't stop with us! The weird and wonderful Mr. Depp will star in Michael Mann's flick *Public Enemies*. As of now details are super sketchy, but from what we can tell thus far, the movie is based on a book covering American gangsters (read: mobsters, not Snoop Dogg-esque 'gangstaz'). Set in the 1930s, Depp will star opposite the Dark Knight himself (that's Christian Bale, in case you've been living under a rock for the past six months). Michael Mann hasn't made a bad movie, like, ever. So hopes are high for this one. Due for the big screen in '09.

?



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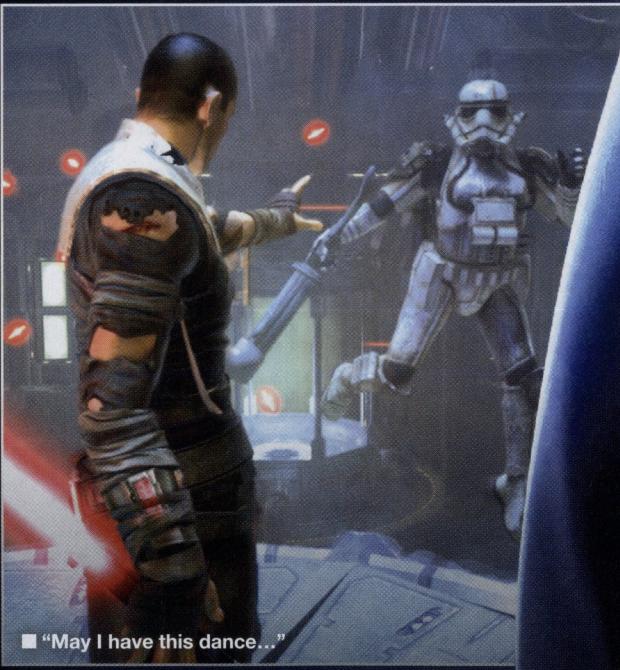
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Codes, hints, tips, unlockables and more!

TIPS & CHEATS

STAR WARS: THE FORCE UNLEASHED

Skip a few grades and go from Padawan to Jedi Master with our cheeky tactics



■ "May I have this dance..."

It's time to unleash your inner Force. *Star Wars: The Force Unleashed* can be a tough ride through some of the nastiest places in that galaxy far, far away. To make sure you can be at your dark best when splattering the remaining Jedi and anyone else who gets in your way, we've put together our own set of Jedi training tips. May the Force be with you, etc, etc.

THE FORCE & HOW TO SWING IT

FORCE LIGHTNING

In *The Force Unleashed*, one of the best powers you have is Force Lightning, so funnel all your Force points into that when it becomes available. It's great to use mid-air and is excellent against

droids and anything else with metal parts. Use it to charge up objects in your grip to create a Force grenade that detonates on impact.

FORCE GRIP

Force Grip is the other big ability in the game. We're the first to admit it can be tough to aim with, but it does have a sort of auto-aim feature built into it – provided you throw your object generally towards enemies, it's bound to hit something. Using it to slam something down on someone is easier, as there's a slight golden shadow on the ground beneath the object in your grip.

FORCE PUSH

Don't underestimate this bad boy. Either

charge it up to knock over a room full of small enemies, or tap the push button to push enemies over edges or into energy barriers. Even if you just knock them down, you can often go right up to them and finish them off with a quick stab. Pointless on larger enemies, though.

SABER THROW

More of a flashy move than anything else. It's great for finishing off lone enemies and taking on some of the saber-wielding bosses, but isn't all that practical in a large melee as you're vulnerable to laser fire when you don't have your saber.

FORCE SHIELD

This one is handy for taking on mobs of easy enemies and some bosses, but as

it depletes your Force reserves using it does make you open to harsh counter-attacks.

FORCE REPULSE

Another move that's more gorgeous than practical, it's handy for when you find yourself surrounded and need to knock down everyone quickly, but while you're charging it up you're open to laser fire, so be wary.

MONSTER SLAYING

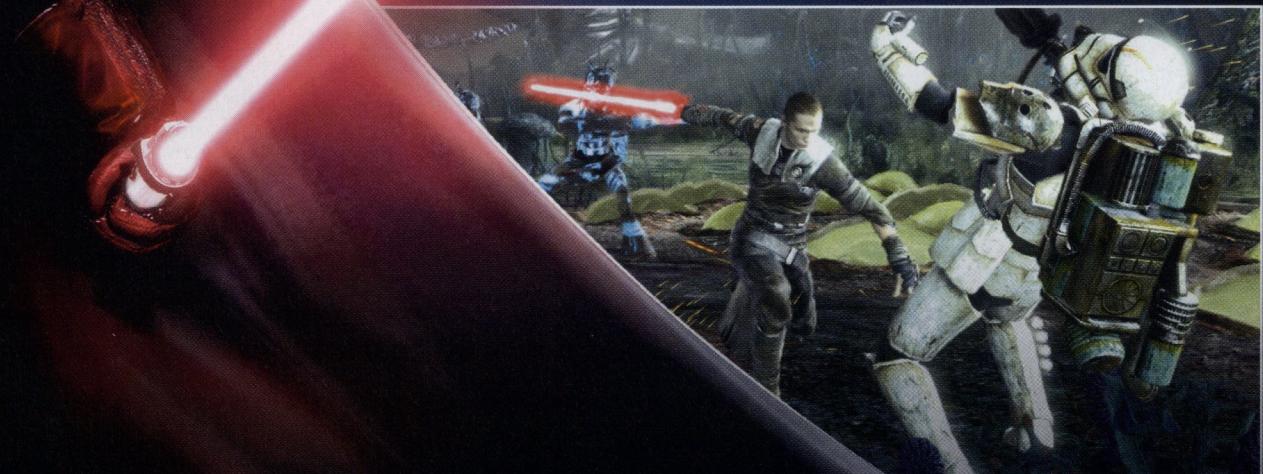
RANCORS & FORCE BOTS

These foul lads can be quite the challenge. Primarily they throw huge objects your way for massive damage and try to stomp you into the ground. When your Force Lightning is leveled

■ In the words of John Travolta – it's electrifying



"Without leveled up Force Lightning you'll have to rely on your saber and dash skills..."



up you can take them down with three to four full charges, but until then, try to dash behind them, double jump, and unleash a volley of saber slashes.

AT-STS

These guys are tough to deal with in a pack, but easy to dispatch on their own. If possible, try to find some cover and bombard them with objects with Force Grip. Don't emerge from cover unless you've managed to take out their support troops either, or you'll be blasted by laser fire.

KILL YOUR BOSS JEDIS

The first three bosses you take on try to cut you up with their sabers, push you

about with Force Push, and smash you with objects from Force Grip. Without leveled up Force Lightning you'll have to rely on your saber and dash skills. Get in close when you can and pump out some combos. Force Push can also be quite effective. If you manage to knock them over, dash up to them and hit them when they're down.

BULL RANCOR

The only difference this guy has, as opposed to the other rancors, is that he loves to charge you down. Use your dashing skills to get behind him and dish out some hurt.

DARTH MAUL

He's the fastest boss you'll take on by

far. Use Lightning and Push to try and knock him down and then hit him with a combo before backing off. Double dash, jump about and keep moving. Unlike the Jedi, it's best if you don't try to go toe-to-toe with him.

STAR DESTROYER

Wow, this one can be painful. Take out the TIE Fighters with Lightning and then you'll get a few moments to use your Grip to crash the Star Destroyer. This can take some time. Note that the on-screen instructions for where to position the sticks aren't all that accurate. Use them as a guide only as you try to position the ship so you're looking right down its nose. Take out the next batch of TIEs, rinse and repeat.

DARTH VADER

You'll have two cracks at Vader. The first time it's all about your Lightning causing him pain. When you move into the second area he'll try and smash you with all manner of objects. Take cover and throw some of your own objects at him for big damage.

THE EMPEROR

Something something *Dark Side...* something something *complete!* Block his lightning attacks and use combos to cause him pain. Move outside the round area and hide behind cover when he starts throwing junk at you. Take out his guards to score extra health, then charge the Emperor down with your own Lightning and up-close saber strikes.

DATABASE

All the games
that matter
on PS3!

FUTURE WATCH

The PS3 games to grab in the coming months

BAYONETTA

Release: 2009

If you were a kid asked to invent the coolest game character ever you might suggest a big, bad witch with transforming attack hair and guns on her wrists – and ankles! A kid didn't imagine *Bayonetta*, though, *Devil May Cry*'s

Hideki Kamiya did, and we doff our pointy hats, because we want this monster-mashing actioner now!

DAMNATION

Release: November 2008

Feed us the terms 'vertical shooter', 'daredevil acrobatics' and 'vehicle-based stunts' and we tend to get a tad sweaty, especially when they're describing a forthcoming

TPS that's promising a world so big it would take hours just to walk uninterrupted across, let alone stopping to battle bastich scum along the way.

THE GODFATHER II

Release: Early 2009

Whilst EA's original *Godfather* hardly rocked our world off its axis, we're hoping that this second effort will make us happy little mobsters.

Being able to grab then kick or headbutt the shite out of ne'er-do-wells is a great start, plus you can go all *Truman Show* with a strategic 'Don's View'. How can we refuse?

THE LEGEND OF SPYRO: DAWN OF THE DRAGON

Release: November 2008

Surviving the Actizard murder of Sierra, this is the climax of the *Legend of Spyro* trilogy, and being all next gen and stuff we're expecting some pretty big things. It's a

future flash, where everybody's fave dragon teams up with former nemesis, winged dra-goth Cynder, to defeat the nasty ol' Dark Master.

PS3 TOP 20



METAL GEAR SOLID 4: GUNS OF THE PATRIOTS

Arguably the best PS3 game to date – an undisputed masterpiece. A legendary game with a legendary hero.



GRAND THEFT AUTO IV

The scope and scale of *GTA IV* is beyond anything gaming has ever had to offer. No game has come close to creating a world anything like Liberty City.



ASSASSIN'S CREED

A landmark in gaming history. Nothing short of awe-inspiring. The missions are samey, but navigating open worlds will never be the same. The biggest leap since *GTA III*.



UNCHARTED: DRAKE'S FORTUNE

The best PlayStation exclusive on the market and the best looking console game to date. Frankly, *Uncharted* rocks up to the party and just plain owns everything...



CALL OF DUTY 4

Relentlessly exciting. Includes a dizzying variety of combat scenarios and stacks of bleeding-edge military hardware. You'd have to be insane, or a girly-man, to miss it.



ROCK BAND

The best party game ever and a triumph in every department, with a killer set list and rad instruments. You wanted the best; you got the best – *Rock Band* rocks.



MOTORSTORM

Fast, hard, dirty and utterly exhilarating, *MotorStorm* is essential for everyone's PS3. Not even the lack of split-screen can detract from this fantastic racer.



RESISTANCE: FALL OF MAN

The perfect launch title for PS3, and possibly the best console FPS ever made. The massive 40-player online deathmatches are more fun than you can imagine.



THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION

One of the deepest adventures we've ever laid eyes on. Simply put – awesome. This is arguably the only RPG you'll need for some time to come.



SKATE

A groundbreaking title that resets the bar for sports games in general. It kickflips *Tony Hawk's* to the kerb with its simple approach. Irresistibly addictive and downright essential.



WARHAWK

There is no better multiplayer game on PS3 right now. Tighter than a bull's arse on fight night and smoother than a glass of Guinness, it's a superior piece of software.



BURNOUT PARADISE

Despite the lack of the old Crash Mode, the overwhelming majority of *Burnout Paradise* rocks harder than Slash during an epic guitar solo. So fast, so wild.



HEAVENLY SWORD

Heavenly Sword is one of the best games we've seen in ages. A beautiful, yet deep, masterpiece and an awesomely enjoyable ride, albeit a rather short one.



GUITAR HERO III

Captures everything perfect about *Guitar Hero* with the best track list yet, but very nearly spoiled it all with the ridiculous new Battle Mode.



COLIN McRAE DIRT

Colin McRae DIRT is an ambitious, accessible racer with a surprising amount of depth. The best rally sim ever? You better believe it. Rest in peace, big guy.



THE DARKNESS

Tentacles and guns – the perfect combination! Stunning, original and gory as hell. You'd have to be dim to miss *The Darkness*.



STUNTMAN: IGNITION

The vehicular equivalent of a 10-hour-long orgasm. Gentlemen, start your boners. *Stuntman: Ignition* succeeds in upending the original in every way.



RATCHET & CLANK FUTURE: TOOLS OF DESTRUCTION

The biggest, wildest, most interesting, varied and downright good ol' fashioned fun adventure these two have been part of.



THE ORANGE BOX

A stellar package; ripe, in season and packed full of vitamin value. If there isn't one title here that does it for you, your gaming license is null and void.



RACE DRIVER: GRID

No V8s and no Australian tracks and it still rates up there with the best of 'em for the suped up cars, intensity and speeeeeeeed! A very pretty package!

PS3

ARMORED CORE 4

5 COOLEST GAME ROBOTIC THINGS

A far better alternative to *Mobile Suit Gundam*.

BEOWULF

Has the dubious honour of ticking every game cliché.

BLADESTORM: THE HUNDRED YEARS' WAR

A solid mix of genres wrapped in an intriguing tale.

BLAZING ANGELS II: SECRET MISSIONS OF WWII

Not quite the ace of aces at this stage.

CALL OF DUTY 3

A solid, but surprisingly unspectacular, shooter.

CLIVE BARKER'S JERICHO

Sick and twisted, but not enough variety.

THE CLUB

Compulsive and fun – one club you should join.

CONAN

A bulldog of bloodletting, savage adventure and boobies.

DEVIL MAY CRY 4

A worthy entry into the series, but the backtracking spoils it.

DEF JAM: ICON

Somehow it's won its way into our hearts. Stupid fun.

THE EYE OF JUDGEMENT

Impressive tech, but it's still a \$160 card game.

F.E.A.R.

A chilling ride, but the graphics are a bit of a shocker.

FIFA 08

Finally puts *FIFA* on level terms with *Pro Evolution*.

FIFA STREET 3

The saviour for your multiplayer soul. Simple, but fun.

FIGHT NIGHT ROUND 3

Boasts visuals that will knock the teeth out of you.

FOLKLORE

Great graphics, memorable characters. A sweet surprise.

FULL AUTO 2: BATTLELINES

Brims with potential, but fails to live up to it.

GENJI: DAYS OF THE BLADE

Plodding gameplay that belongs on the Atari 2600.

THE GODFATHER: THE DON'S EDITION

Fine, but do yourself a favour and get the PS2 version.

THE GOLDEN COMPASS

Uninspired level design and dull quests make this a chore.

HARRY POTTER & THE ORDER OF THE PHOENIX

Decent, but its chore-like structure will bore most.

JUICED 2: HOT IMPORT NIGHTS

A top bit of racing fluff, although it's all a tad generic.

KANE & LYNCH: DEAD MEN

One part *Hitman*, one part Michael Mann; mostly a letdown.

LAIR

A massive letdown. It feels rushed and unfinished.

LOST PLANET: EXTREME CONDITION

Solid enough, but a lazy port and a visual letdown.



GLaDOS (Portal, The Orange Box)

'She' may be a self-confessed crap artist, but we reckon any robot that offers us cake can't be all bad, right?



KOS-MOS (Xenosaga series)

This all-robot 'gal' is considered sexy by some sectors of the gaming community. Oh well, as long as nobody gets hurt!



Dr Robotnik (Sonic series)

Robotnik, Eggman, human, robot, whatever. We're such Sonic slappers that we had to squeeze him in somewhere.



Dog (Half-Life 2, The Orange Box)

Ah, what a 'little' sweetie Alyx's 'pet' is, 10-foot tall but fiercely protective - and cute - 'till the end. Actually, we could use one.



Clank (Ratchet & Clank series)

Coolest. Sidekick. Ever. The funky, bon mot-flinging Clank is the kinda robo-sidekick we really dig on!

MADDEN NFL 08

Some great improvements and plenty of modes.

MARVEL: ULTIMATE ALLIANCE

Great co-op and an exhaustive list of Marvel's greatest.

MEDAL OF HONOR AIRBORNE

A dinosaur of an FPS – wait for *Brothers in Arms* instead.

MOBILE SUIT GUNDAM: TARGET IN SIGHT

A rubber Godzilla of a title. What a pipe blocker!

MX VS. ATV UNTAMED

Feels like a PS2 port, looks like a PS2 port. Disappointing.

NBA 08

Fails to pick a side (sim or arcade) and so fails at both.

NBA 2K8

Not as pretty as *LIVE*, but has more depth.

NBA LIVE 08

Best of its kind. B-ball devotees will adore it, guaranteed.

NBA STREET HOMECOURT

The brashest, most addictive arcade basketball game yet.

NEED FOR SPEED CARBON

The last *NFS* street racer before the series went legit.

NEED FOR SPEED PROSTREET

Great smoke, but more depth would've been nice.

NINJA GAIDEN SIGMA

A treasure trove of gaming goodness, super tough.

PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN: AT WORLD'S END

A very shallow slash 'em up. Ye be warned.

PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 2008

Still the best soccer in the biz, but the graphics are dire.

SEGA SUPERSTAR TENNIS

Enough with Sonic trying to best Mario.

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG

Mostly terrible. Avoid at all costs.

STRANGLEHOLD

Max Payne-inspired action, plenty of frantic fun.

TIME CRISIS 4

Bipolar, so stick to the arcade mode.

TOM CLANCY'S GHOST RECON: AW2

A tense, realistic shooter, but *Rainbow Six Vegas* is better.

TONY HAWK'S PROVING GROUND

Struggles to escape the shadow of *SKATE*.

TUROK

Packs plenty of bite, but it's missing a few teeth.

UNREAL TOURNAMENT 3

Gorgeous and gory, but the lack of split-screen blows.

UEFA EURO 2008

A possible contender for football game of the year.

VIRTUA TENNIS 3

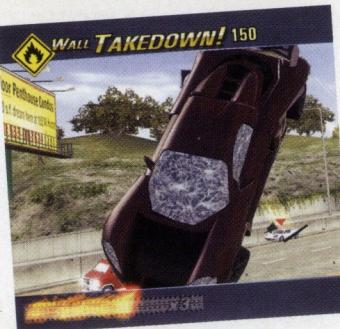
Some of the best fun four people can have on one PS3.

WWE SMACKDOWN VS. RAW 2008

A solid entry. A few new additions, but still plays the same.

MAGIC MOMENTS

Great moments in PlayStation history remembered!



THE GAME: Burnout 3: Takedown

THE CONSOLE: PS2

THE YEAR: 2004

THE MOMENT: Two words people, 'road' and 'rage'. No, we're not referring to the old EA series of bitumen burners, but rather a certain additional mode included in the killer third incarnation of the *Burnout* series, still one of our fave racers ever.

While argument has, erm, argued for years on the advantages of realism in videogames compared to those of suspended belief, and will likely continue as long as vehicular geeks exist, we're prepared to lay our car(d)s on the table. You can stick your realism in your (exhaust) pipe and smoke it, Grandad, 'cos we'll take an adrenaline-fuelled arcade mode with a simply nuts feeling of speed over your stodgy 'realism' every day of the week. If we want real, we'll jump in the OPS mobile and brave the traffic on a lunch run. Fun, woo, yeah. Quite simply, your *Gran Turismos* and their ilk are Celine Dion to *Burnout 3: Takedown*'s Pete Doherty, just without the drug habit – probably because the game IS the drug habit.

You want magic moments? Your first drift? Meh, s'not bad. Your first grind? Yeah, we're listenin'. Your first takedown? Abso-fcking-lutely priceless! You know that granny that pootled out right in front of you on the grocery run last week? Pootle her back – without all that messy, time-consuming, police involvement stuff. That arsemanch hogging the right lane on the freeway in his Bleurghmobile screaming along at, ooh, about 60 in a 100 zone? They put the wrong *Franz Ferdinand* song in the game, it should have been 'Take Me Out'. That %#\$!ing *%&%-dribbling, @#\$-sucking !*&^-%\$#er that ploughed through a roundabout the other day nearly ripping your shiny acemobile in two – and had the nerve to give you the finger as he did it? RAM THAT %@#\$er INTO THE MOTHER*&%ING NEXT MILLENNIUM!

Taking a look back at the best in the business...

RETROSPECTIVE

TEAM BUDDIES

Why can't we be friends?

It's often said that real-time strategy games simply can't work on consoles, and that 'crates' in gaming represent lazy game design. While both these statements are usually true, *Team Buddies* is the exception that proves the rule. This 2000 game was an RTS for the original PlayStation, and it worked amazingly well. And yes, it revolved entirely around packing crates.

The key to its success was that the content inside the crates wasn't random. Scattered around the colourful, cartoony levels, they were only activated when you carried them back to base and placed them on a special platform. Place one by itself and smash it, and it would deliver a (colourful, cartoony) handgun. Place two side-by-side, and you'd get a bigger gun. Place two on top of each other, and a fresh Team Buddy would jump out, eager for your orders.

Thus *Team Buddies* wasn't just about gathering and smashing crates; it was about making crucial tactical decisions. Do I need more *Team Buddies*? Do I need more guns? Should I save up eight crates and get myself a stealth fighter? These decisions, and more, had to be made every second. Make no mistake, *Team Buddies* was intense.

But it did not punish unduly. Your friendly buddies could be

given basic AI standing orders (gather more crates, attack, etc), and the interface was clean and clear. Best of all, the game did not take itself remotely seriously. Each different coloured team had a different kind of English accent (Scouser, Cockney, etc), and all of the little bastards swore like sailors. The red team, if memory serves, was Australian: 'What a cute little koala!' Sure, it was a tacky, English cliché of our speech patterns, but it's always nice to see some

Aussies in there, mixing it up.

Sadly, the *Team Buddies* legacy began and ended on the PSOne. Now that it's been fully absorbed into Sony Computer Entertainment Europe, little of the old Psygnosis culture remains. The few remaining coders and designers toil on *SingStar* and PlayStation Eye games, not sweaty, preposterous shooty romps that redefine the very RTS. And don't get your hopes up for a



sequel, either. Every time we ask Sony if *Team Buddies 2* is coming, they don't say "No," they say "What's *Team Buddies*?" Not a good sign.

Team Buddies is totally worth checking out - if you can find it. In the meantime, the closest equivalent on the horizon is *Fat Princess* for PSN. It'll have fast action, colour, clarity, and a sick sense of humour. And what more could you ask for? **J. James Cottée**



INFLATED OPINIONS



At first glance, the *Team Buddies* buddies appear to be walking, talking pharmaceutical capsules, complete with *Rayman*-style magnetically attached hands and feet. But they're actually just a rubber film covering compressed air. Living beach toys, basically. One publicity still featured a Team Buddy bending over and dropping his dacks to reveal his, er, air valve. You just don't see that in games anymore...

Get serious about your toys!



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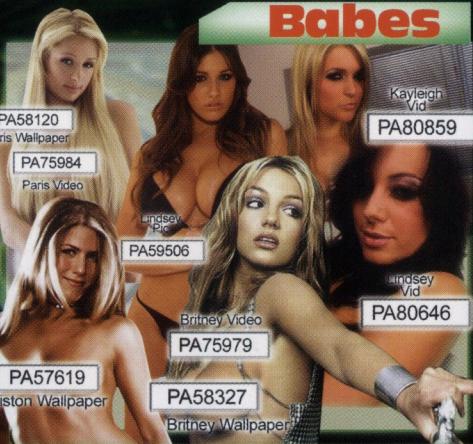
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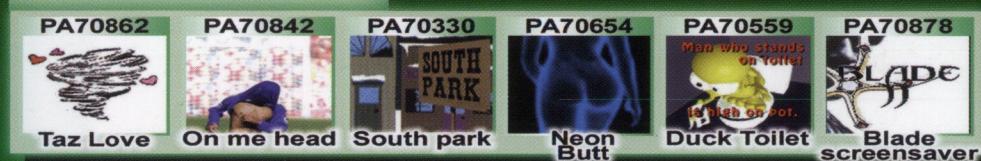


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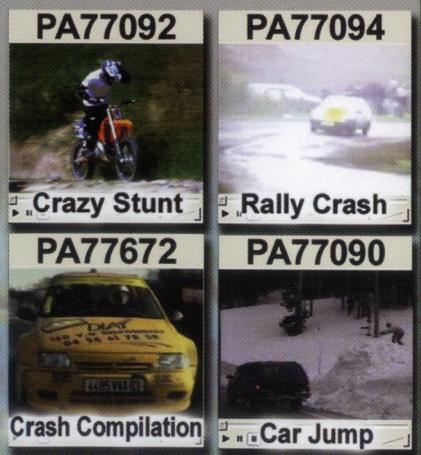
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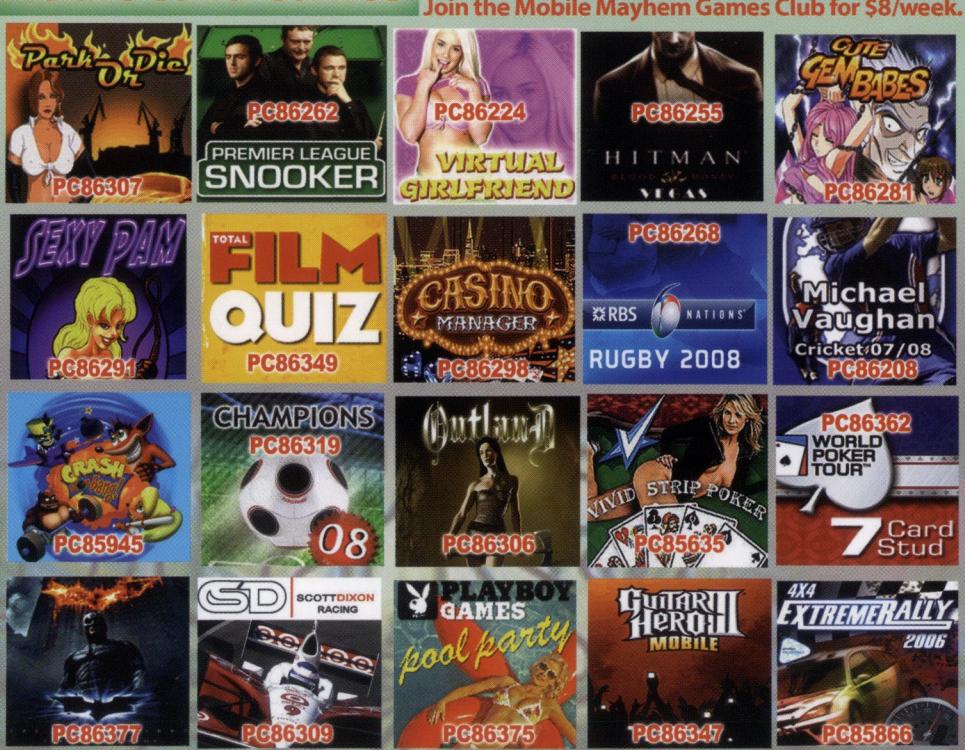
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